

BASEBALL It's almost July and your season's sunk. Now what?

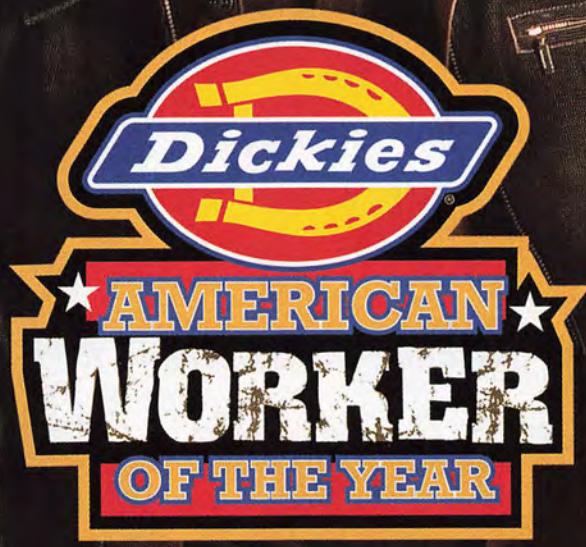
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Sporting News

[David Tyree]
A miracle beyond
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A talented trio. A team crackling with chemistry. Jump on for the ride, everyone—Boston hasn't looked this good in a while. By Stan McNeal

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When a team goes south, a managerial tongue-lashing may provide new direction—or perhaps it will take a trade, luck, patience ... or maybe there is no answer. By Sean Devaney

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The only thing more stunning than David Tyree's Super Bowl catch is the way the Giants receiver has turned around his life. By Dennis Dillon

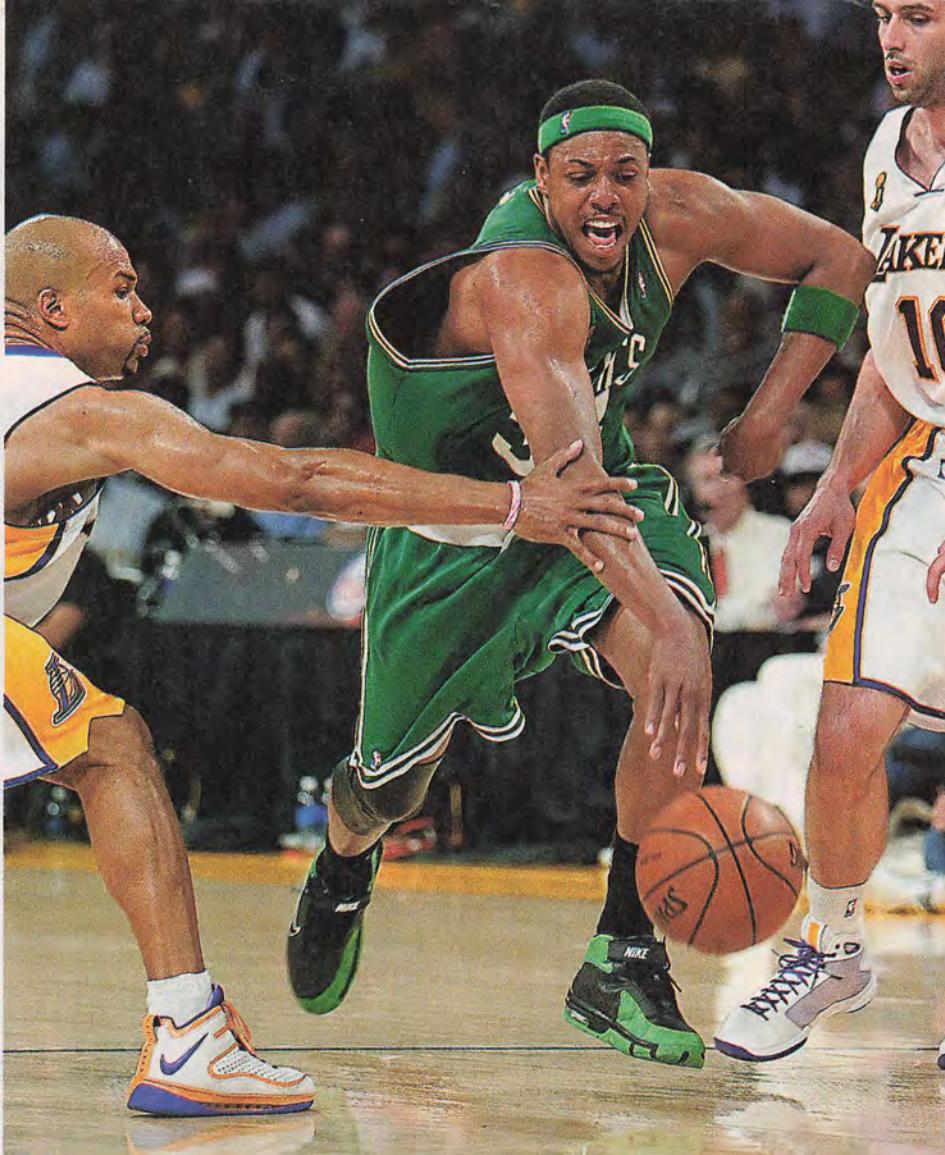
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There might not be an Ovechkin or Crosby available, but this year's draft has a Stamkos and some less glitzy but good prizes. By Chuck Gormley

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16 Paul Pierce put up some gaudy numbers on offense, but maybe the Celtics' defense is what we should be celebrating.

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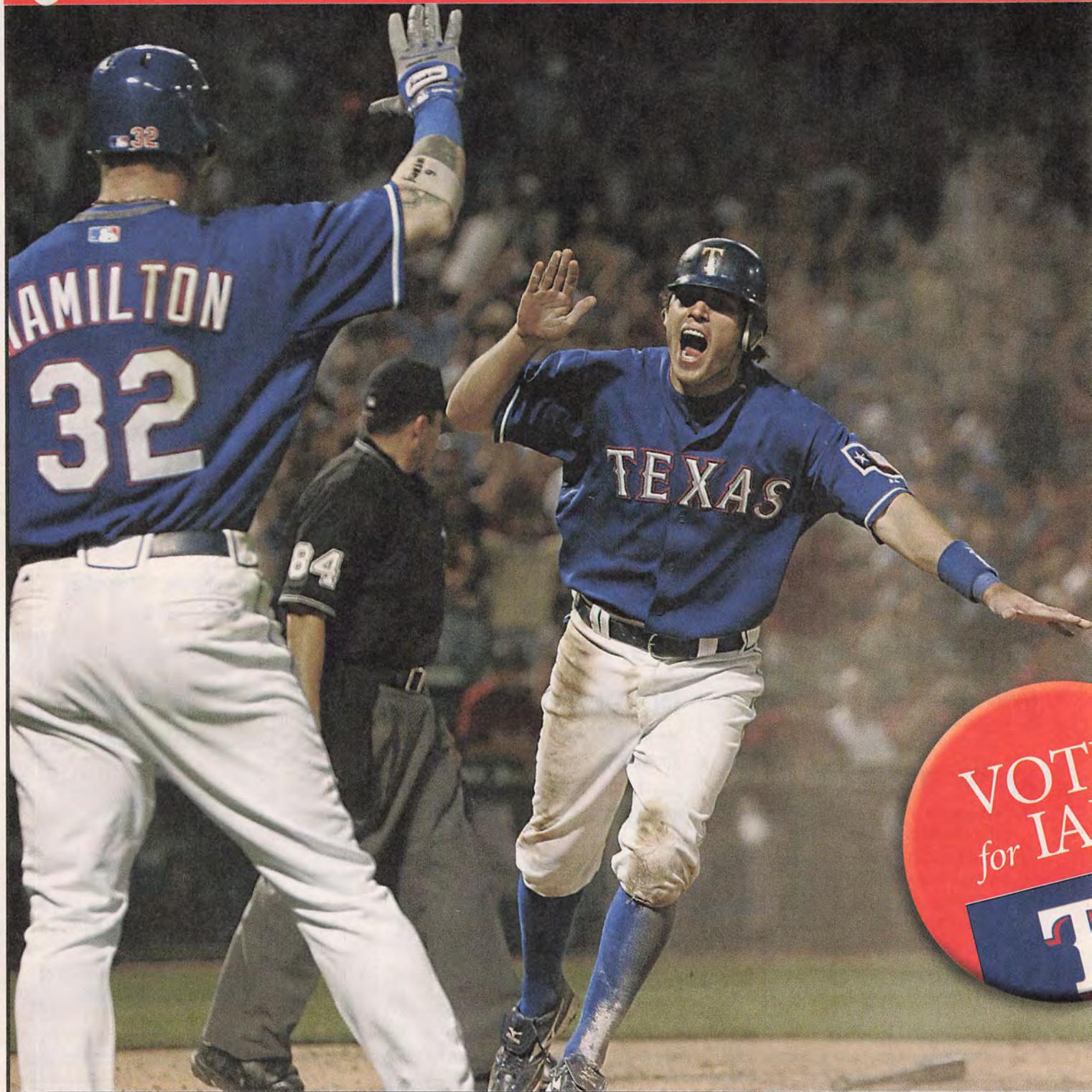
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KNOW IT ALL KNOW IT ALL

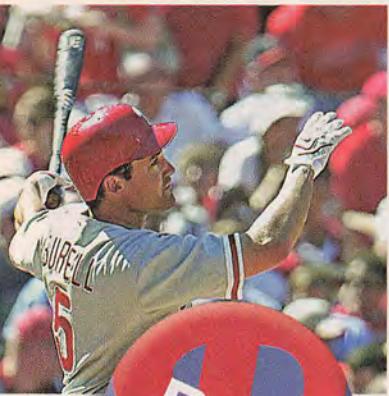
TO KNOW LIST

6 things to make you an INSTANT EXPERT this week



FROM LEFT: LM OTERO / AP; TOM GANNON / AP; JAY DROWNS / SI; JOHN CORDES FOR SI; ALBERT DICKSON / SH

KNOW IT ALL KNOW IT ALL



1

THE MAIN EVENT

Rock the vote

Voting for baseball's All-Stars is never easy—fans don't have much opportunity to size up players on all 30 teams, and it's easy to get blinded by past stardom when it comes time to punch those chads (not Billingsley or Moeller). Looking at the way the voting has come in so far, though, it's clear there are players who just aren't getting enough ballot love.

Ian Kinsler, Michael Young and Milton Bradley, Rangers. Texas outfielder Josh Hamilton has been outstanding, and he has garnered most of the attention for his team's offensive emergence. But the Rangers deserve praise beyond Hamilton, even if the voting public is fixated on its Yankees-Red Sox favorites. Kinsler is having by far the best season at the plate for an A.L. second baseman—and has 17 steals while being caught just once—but trails Boston's Dustin Pedroia in the voting. Young has been far better than any A.L. shortstop but has garnered less than half the votes Derek Jeter has. Bradley, who is on the ballot as an outfielder and not as a designated hitter, has gotten more notice for off-field shenanigans than for the fact he leads the A.L. (and is way ahead of the DH leading vote-getter David Ortiz) in OPS.

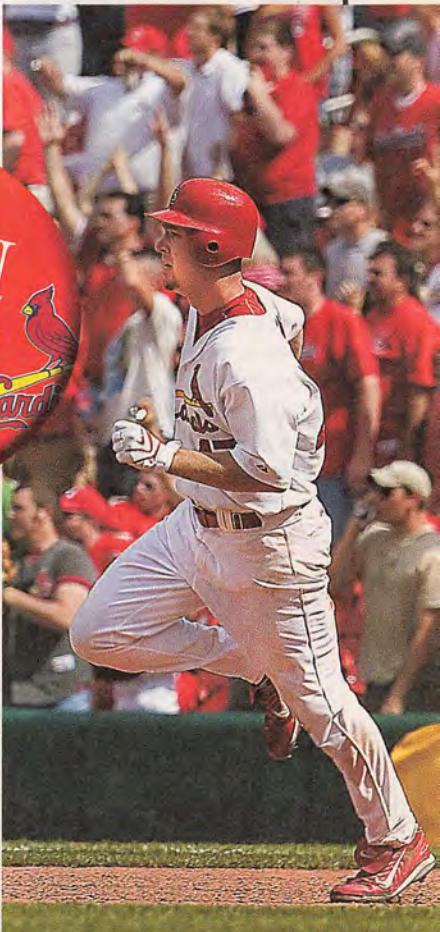
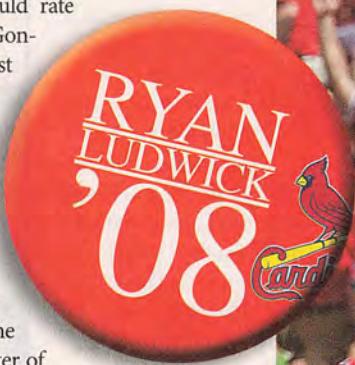
Ryan Ludwick, Cardinals. He has about a third of Alfonso Soriano's votes despite being the top outfield slugger in the N.L. Ludwick will turn 30 two days before the All-Star Game and had never played more than 40 games in a season at the big league level before 2007. So he's not supposed to be here. Perhaps his

amazing first half is a fluke, but if so, he has pulled it off long enough that he deserves an All-Star spot.

Adrian Gonzalez, Padres. It's easy to get lost in the stratosphere of N.L. first basemen, but with Albert Pujols hurting, Gonzalez should rate behind only Lance Berkman. Gonzalez is the best defensive first baseman in baseball and is among the league leaders in home runs and slugging percentage despite playing in power number-sapping Petco Park.

Joe Crede, White Sox. Not that Alex Rodriguez is undeserving of an All-Star spot, but he will have missed nearly a quarter of the first half. Crede has been healthy after rehabbing from back surgery and has been one of the most clutch hitters for the first-place White Sox. He's one of the better defensive third basemen in baseball.

Pat Burrell, Phillies. The exploits of teammates Chase Utley and Ryan Howard obscure what Burrell has done. He and Utley essentially carried the offense through Howard's early slump, and Burrell remains on pace to go well over 30 homers. Unfortunately for him, the stigma of being a No. 1 overall pick who never quite became Mike Schmidt sticks with him, and he barely ranks in the top 10 in voting among outfielders. —Sean Devaney

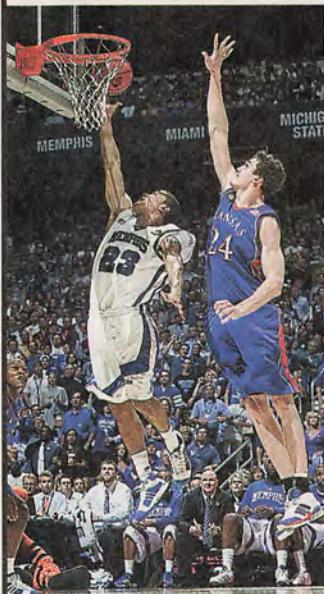


2

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: BULLS FANS

A Rose by another name (rhymes with Wayne Dade) sure would cheer things up

The Bulls were one of only two NBA teams to draw 900,000 tushes for regular-season home games in 2007-08, and that figure should hold steady next season as the team trots out the league's No. 1 draft pick—likely Chicago's own Derrick Rose.

**Rose**

Meanwhile, how to please the broad-shouldered masses with that top pick in next Thursday's draft? If selecting Rose—a two-time state champ at Simeon High—can't get it done, the Bulls may have a fan mutiny on their hands.

The good news: 10,000 votes in, 83 percent of fans wanted to see a Chi-Towner who made good added to the roster. The bad news: His name is Dwyane Wade. —Steve Greenberg

3

NUMBERS THAT COUNT

1-on-1

Better news out of Chicago: The interleague series at Wrigley Field between the Cubs and White Sox this weekend couldn't come under more promising circumstances. Among the "firsts":

- their positions in the N.L. Central and A.L. Central standings.
 - the Cubs' major league-leading .283 batting average and N.L.-best 5.5 runs per game.
 - the White Sox's major league-leading 3.32 ERA.
- Sunday's game is at 8 p.m. ET on ESPN. —S.G.



4

OUCH!

Forget about double the pleasure—it was double the *pain* last week for Royals catcher John Buck, who was hit by his broken bat one day and then hit by a pitch the next. The day after that? He sat out. Wouldn't you?

5

QUICK CLICKS**More bang for your buck**

The only thing better than a bargain is a baseball bargain, right? Check out mlb.com/mlb/tickets/value.jsp for a team-by-team listing of the values—on tickets, food and merchandise—available at your local major league ballpark.

In Minnesota, take advantage of the "Tanks from the Twins" promotion, where you receive a discount equal to the national average for a gallon of gas. In Atlanta, you can buy \$1 skyline seats three hours prior to game time. In Milwaukee, you can buy \$1 Uecker seats (must not be in the front row) when gates open. In Tampa, cars with four or more people park for free. In Anaheim, fans get to watch fireworks shows on 13 Fridays throughout the season.



6

YOU HEARD IT HERE

'I would definitely say that there was something going on beyond a poorly officiated game.'

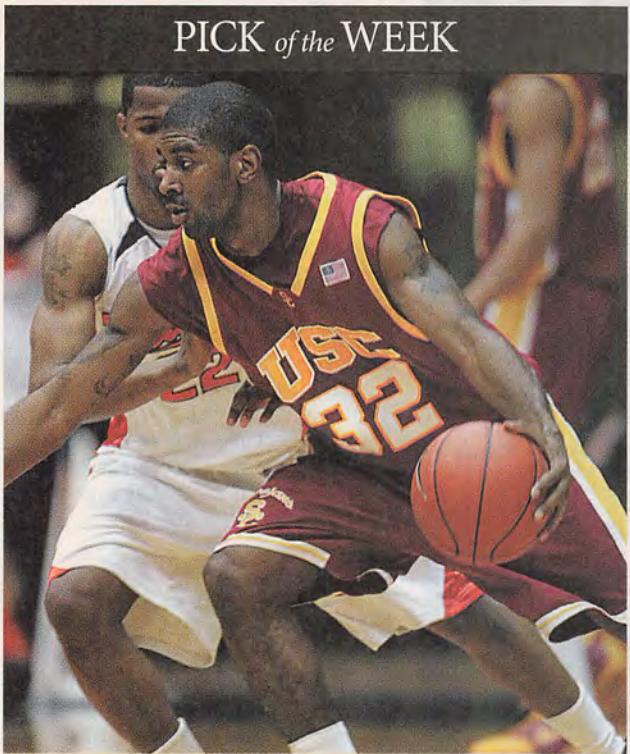
—Former Kings guard Doug Christie to NBA Insider Stan McNeal after ex-NBA referee Tim Donaghy alleged last week that refs tilted the Lakers-Kings 2002 Western Conference finals in the Lakers' favor

KNOW IT ALL KNOW IT ALL

ON DECK

All times Eastern

>>>>> The week ahead in sports



PICK of the WEEK

Mayo wore USC cardinal and gold last season ... which team's colors will he be wearing on draft night?

THU 26

NBA draft (7 p.m., ESPN). Yep, this is the biggie. It's Derrick and Michael and O.J. and Jerryd and Kevin and a bunch of lottery-bound talents. It's the Bulls and Heat and Timberwolves and Sonics and Grizzlies and a bunch of other teams trying to build a foundation. Who will land where? We'll find out soon enough.

SAT 21 The Beijing Games are right around the corner, and it's time to figure out who's going to represent the good ol' USA. NBC is sharing the **U.S. Olympic Trials** with us all day—diving at 3:30, men's gymnastics at 4:30 and women's gymnastics at 8.

SUN 22 This weekend is all about the USA proving itself on the world stage. Now, it's the beautiful game as the **U.S. men play Barbados** in a World Cup qualifier (2:55, ESPN Classic).

MON 23 **College World Series** (7 p.m., ESPN2). This is for all the marbles; the whole kit and caboodle; the whole enchilada. Game 1 in the best-of-three series, live from Rosenblatt Stadium in Omaha, complete with all the passion and pride you can bear to watch.

WED 25 **Diamondbacks at Red Sox** (7 p.m., ESPN2). Here's a shocker—the Red Sox are on national TV. But, of course, we'll watch Manny and the boys take on the N.L. West leaders (as if that's impressive). —Ryan Fagan

BOB HILLE'S STARTING 5

1 **The NBA.** Tim Donaghy's accusations kind of took the luster off The Finals. I just want to go back to a more innocent time—like when the All-Star Game was in Vegas.

2 **Summer.** This is when the family and I fall in love with baseball all over again. In fact, we're pumped. We've got tickets for Milton Bradley Roman Candle Night.

3 **The NHL draft.** I don't know much about how this works, so I'm wondering if scouts determine prospects' ages like horses. You know, by checking their teeth.

4 **Kyle Busch.** Wow, have you ever seen anyone get a nastier reception than this guy gets? Usually to be disliked by this many people you have to be elected.

5 **\$4 gas.** Ha! They said it would never happen, but at last the invention I patented a couple of years ago is economically viable. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you a car engine that runs on stadium beer.

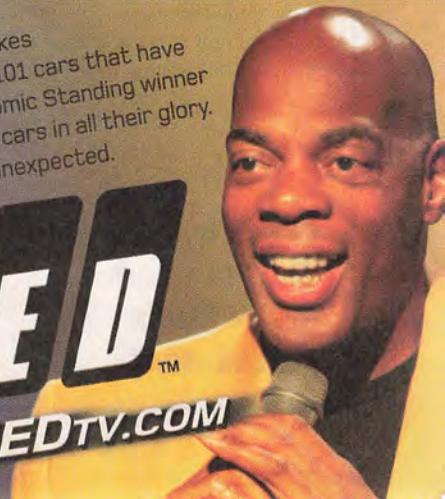
DUSTY PERIN / AP

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YOUR TURN

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I think the old-school Celtics and Lakers would have put an old-fashioned mollywhopping on the new-age kids.

—slim.sweetness
via SportingNews.com

■ The NBA needs to realize that the old days of the Lakers and Celtics (SN, June 9) were 21 years ago—meaning that if you're an NBA fan under 27, you probably don't even know what the hell they're talking about. Can you imagine how bad the NFL would be if it shoved the glory years of the 49ers, Cowboys and Steelers down our throats the way the NBA does its “glory” teams? —Deez-DetroitNuts via SportingNews.com

■ Chad Johnson reminds me of a pouting kid saying, “You can make me come to practice, but you can't make me participate.” I expected better of him. —Brownsbacker via SportingNews.com

■ I've been following Tigers baseball for 50 years and have never seen a team so coddled in my life. As a result, they never developed a winning attitude and now it is too late for them to bond as a team. It is disgusting to see the infielders talking

and laughing with the opponents on base while the poor blokes in the stands suffer through a dismal season. —DisgustedinSaginaw via e-mail

■ I see the NBA is working on a new slogan—NBA: Where bad officiating happens! —Scott Hiers via e-mail

■ The NBA isn't fixed, but if one looks at things on a spectrum, it isn't entirely fair, either. If a complete fix is on one end and completely unbiased officiating is on the other end, then the NBA lies in the gray area between the two extremes. —DrBennettPMR via SportingNews.com

POLLING PLACE

Which team is more likely to return to The Finals next season?

SPORTINGNEWS.COM MEMBERS



SPORTING NEWS STAFF



BLOG ON

From your blogs on sportingnews.com

RE: ARE WE THERE YET?

Posted by wesmith2001

Matt Leinart has great potential, but he has yet to convert that potential to production. He has developed some bad habits since joining the Cardinals. At USC, he was used to having a cup of coffee and a sweet roll before having to find a receiver—that is how much better USC's offensive line was compared with the defensive lines the Trojans faced. Leinart has been so badly rushed in Arizona that he tends to lock on one receiver. If the coverage is different from what he expected and that guy isn't open, Leinart is forced to throw the ball away or take the hit.

RE: UNLUCKY CHARMS

Posted by aajoe7

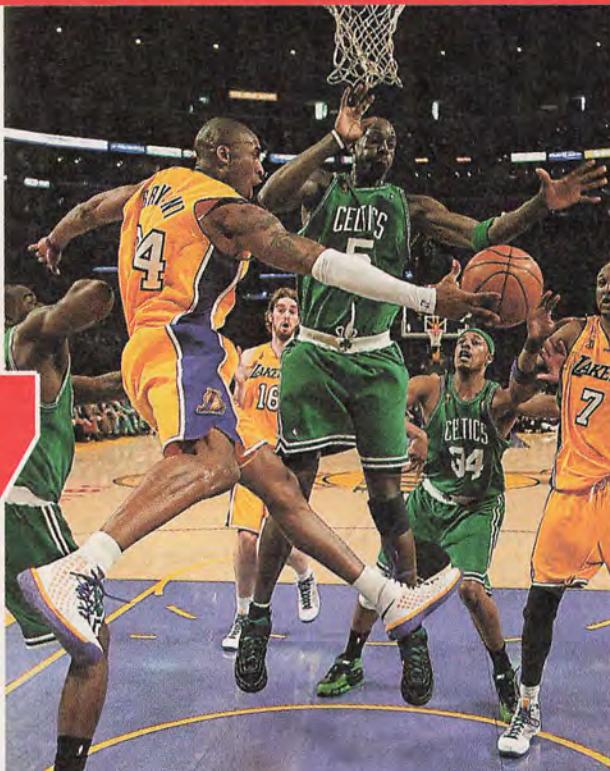
The Seattle Mariners are having the ultimate Murphy's Law season: Everything that could possibly go wrong has gone wrong. From injuries to ineffectiveness to sudden aging, it seems that every player on the team has suffered to some degree. And here's the sad thing: The statistical community largely predicted this downfall, though perhaps not quite to this degree.

But even the most astute stathead couldn't have forecasted what has happened to Adrian Beltre. Quite simply, Beltre has been the unluckiest player in baseball. It seems everything he hits is right at someone.

RADIO STAR

Real talk from a fan on
Sporting News Radio

‘The Cubs finally have what it takes this year. They have the best offense in baseball, and their pitching has been solid, too. It's only a matter of time before Wrigley is home to a champion.’ —Randy in Chicago on the Postgame with Peter Brown



Lakers-Celtics, circa 2008: It's not like the old days.

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KNOW IT ALL KNOW IT ALL

Sports talk with Mike Myers

Hockey fan and star of *The Love Guru*, in theaters Friday

SN: Your character's name is Guru Pitka. A homage to Coach Ditka?

MYERS: No, Pitka is almost a random name; there's much less thought to this than you think. But I did live in Chicago when Mike Ditka was coaching the Bears. I only went to Soldier Field one time. It was the coldest day of my life, but the atmosphere was unbelievable.

SN: The names in this film are so brilliantly silly: Tug-ginmypudha, Harenmahkeester, "Le Coq" Grande. Why the change from such complicated, highbrow monikers as Felicity Shagwell and Alotta Fagina?

MYERS: Yeah, I thought I would really change it up this time. You know, my dad was from Liverpool, England, and loved silly British comedy, and I love silly films. I love very complicated intellectual humor and very dumb humor.

SN: "Humor is humanity's way to escape suffering." I am guessing you believe in Deepak Chopra's words wholeheartedly.

MYERS: A hundred percent. Lenny Bruce's equation for comedy was pain plus time. My father used to say nothing is so painful that it can't be laughed at.

SN: What would Guru Pitka say to the many former NHL devotees who have yet to seek enlightenment from the cable network Versus?

MYERS: Hockey needs a Roone Arledge, someone who

can *televise* it. I would love to see a bench cam, so that when Sidney Crosby is on the bench and about to come out, the audience is aware of that fact. They should offer a "privileged view," as they say in Hollywood. They do this in NASCAR.

SN: In this film, your favorite team, the Maple Leafs, takes a run at its first Stanley Cup since 1967. You weren't old enough in '67 to remember it now. How badly do you want to see them win one in real life?

MYERS: Oh, my God. You know, the Stanley Cup is in the film. I had seen the Cup at the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto. They asked if I wanted to touch it, and I said, "It's not time yet. I can't do that."

SN: Who was the best actor among the many NHLers and ex-NHLers in this film? Or at least the coolest guy?

MYERS: They were all cool. I get tongue-tied around hockey players. It was superexciting to see Rob Blake. Bob Probert was cool. Anybody that's been in the NHL, I can't even talk around them. Doug Gilmour, I couldn't talk.

SN: Best hockey movie ever?

MYERS: *Slap Shot*. Awesome. Brilliantly photographed. To me, this is like *A Christmas Carol*. I watch it once a year.



'Hockey needs a Roone Arledge, someone who can televise it.'

—Steve Greenberg



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Mr. Handshake

Well, do you?

Fail to get home from work in time for the first pick.

Michael Beasley and Derrick Rose are young, unproven and—better hem those pant legs!—short.

Commish Stern is a powerful man—did you just look at him funny? He'll hire a PR. firm.

To a lesser league where amazing happens ... usually without short rookies. —S.G.



**Sorry, Rose (right):
No borrowing Long's
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KNOW IT ALL KNOW IT ALL KNOW IT ALL

Osterman and the Americans are determined to put softball back on the Olympic map.

An un





COUNTDOWN TO BEIJING

Cat Osterman & Co. have given USA Softball one of the most dominant teams in Olympic history. Which begs the question: Is the IOC punishing the Americans for being too good?

By Kate Hairopoulos

Underhanded affair

Cat Osterman remembers clearly the day the International Olympic Committee delivered the crushing decision. The former University of Texas All-American softball pitcher was in Austin in 2005, hanging with some Longhorns baseball players, when the news flashed on TV.

Softball—and baseball, too—would be cut from the Olympics program after August's 2008 Beijing Games.

"Looks like you're retiring soon," one of the baseball players piped up, perhaps in a misguided effort to lighten the situation.

Osterman, recounting the story this spring, recalls her response: "This isn't funny."

Three years later, in fact, she still describes it as "the ultimate shock," the day one of the most successful teams in Olympic history was uninvited to the world's quadrennial athletic party, effective with the 2012 Games in London.

"We had no idea," Osterman says, "that anyone was trying to get us out."

A 52-52 deadlock—with one member abstaining—eliminated the sport during a 2005 IOC assembly in Singapore. In a 2006 reinstatement vote, it was defeated, 47-43. Softball will be contested at the Beijing Games in August but—baring a reversal—not thereafter. That will leave elite players, like Osterman not to mention millions of American girls, with fading hope for once-bright Olympic dreams.

"We understand our sport isn't as popular in some parts of the world," Osterman says.

Softball could be reinstated for the 2016 Summer Games, along with baseball, during an IOC assembly in October 2009 at Copenhagen, Denmark. No more than two sports can be added to the 2016 program—26 sports are shoo-ins, and there's a 28-sport ceiling—when the IOC meets in '09. Several other sports are under consideration, though softball and baseball are the leading candidates.

Still, that's not likely to happen if the problems that have plagued softball since its 1996 Olympics inception—limited worldwide participation, diminishing global appeal and overwhelming U.S. dominance—remain uncorrected.

"My challenge is to get IOC members to come to a game," says Jessica Mendoza, a 2004 gold medalist. "Come to Beijing. Sit in the stands of a softball stadium and look around. Look in the eyes of all the girls who are watching and love the sport and tell me this sport and these women should be removed from the Olympic arena."

Softball backers maintain the IOC wrongly associated their sport with baseball, which has been hurt by doping problems and unable to draw players into the Olympics from major league rosters.

"We're women. We play a different sport," Mendoza says. "We don't take steroids. We don't have the professional options baseball has. We're not turning down the Olympics to make millions of dollars."

The argument against softball's reinstatement? The sport is largely an afterthought throughout the world, especially in Europe, where the IOC is headquartered and a majority of IOC members live. Fewer than 1,000 women play fast-pitch softball in China, the world's most populous country at 1.3 billion. China only recently started T-ball for children and slow-pitch softball for adults. Women participating in competitive sports is frowned upon, if not outlawed, in conser-

'If we get penalized because of our excellence, then there's something wrong with the Olympic Games.'

—U.S. national team coach Mike Candrea

vative Muslim nations. Some countries struggle to keep softball federations afloat despite \$2.5 million in equipment grants from the Florida-based International Softball Federation the past three years.

Mike Candrea, coach of the U.S. national team, contends softball won't make global strides until top-tier American universities attract foreign players from powerhouses such as Australia and Japan.

"Most (other countries) are playing at a lower level," says Candrea, whose team might lose U.S. Olympic Committee funding after Beijing. "If you look at the College World Series in Division I, you see very few foreign athletes."

Oddly, though, perhaps the biggest obstacle for softball is a talented crop of American players, led by power pitcher Jennie Finch. The United States has won three Olympic gold medals, eight world championships, two World Cup of Softball titles and seven Pan American Games titles. It out-scored opponents, 51-1, and broke 17 records in nine consecutive wins at the 2004 Games in Athens. So, could playing its best actually backfire?

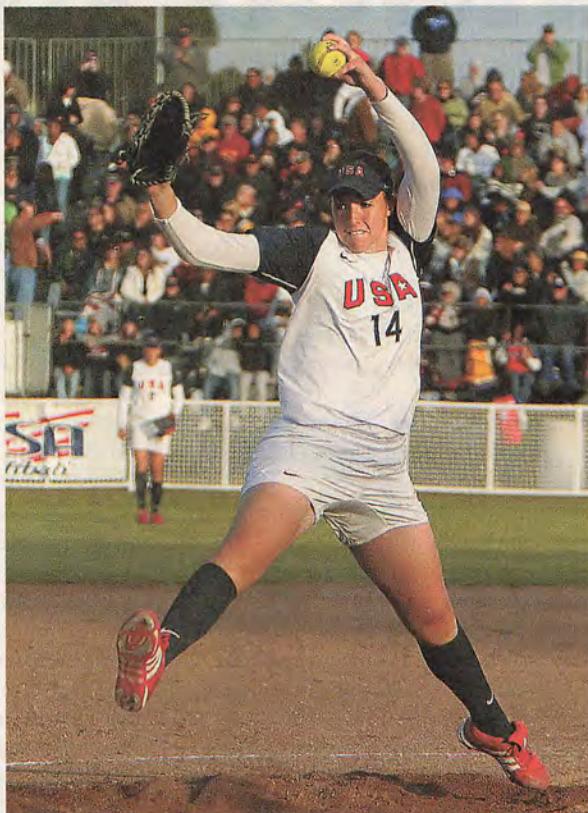
"Give us a *real* reason," says Finch, arguably softball's biggest star and certainly its most recognizable player.

Then, when posed with the upside-down question of whether Olympic softball would benefit from Team USA *not* winning gold, Finch answers: "That's what the Olympic Games are about—excellence and amazing things. You're going to tell us to go in there and not do amazing things? No way."

Candrea is even more candid: "If we get penalized because of our excellence, then there's something wrong with the Olympic Games."



Finch (second player from right), Monica Abbott (below) and their U.S. teammates aren't about to make things easy on opponents.



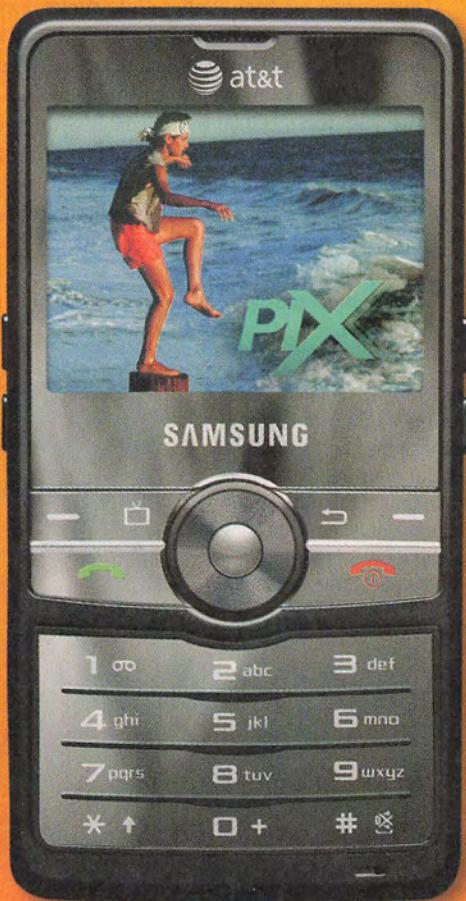
So understand why USA Softball's six-month, 62-game "Bound 4 Beijing" tour is a hybrid—part passionate awareness campaign and part thanks-for-the-memories trek with stops all over the United States. The grass-roots tour is a way to reconnect with fans and grow the sport. Thousands of girls idolize the U.S. players, who have dominated Olympic competition.

But the audience USA Softball needs to impress isn't in Springfield, Mo., or Stevens Point, Wis. Beijing is where votes will be won.

"We're going to have to do everything we can to prove that we belong in the Olympics," Finch says. "In the U.S., millions of girls have the option of getting a scholarship and playing in college. But in other countries, the Olympics is the only place to pursue their dream. We want to continue that dream for the young girls in Croatia or China—that's what it's all about."

This story contains writing and reporting from Brian Gomez.

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COUNTDOWN TO BEIJING

USA Baseball '04

Then: They didn't even qualify for Athens

Now: Many are major league stars

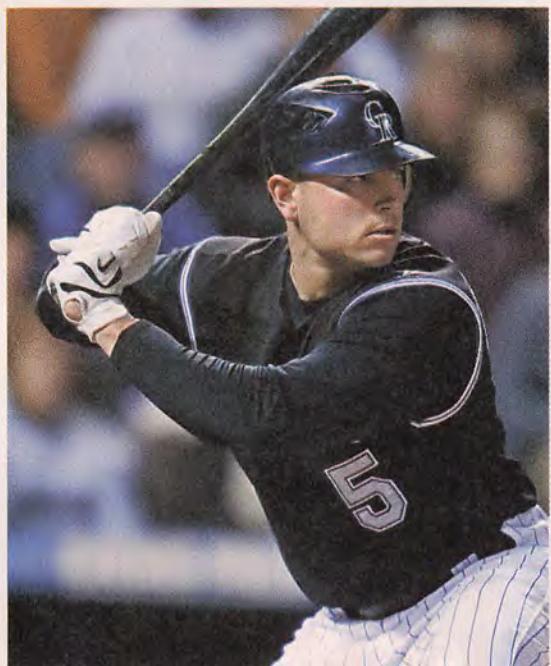
Twenty-one months ago, the Americans righted the ship. A victory against Panama during an Olympic qualifying event in Cuba cemented Team USA's berth on the world's biggest stage: the 2008 Beijing Olympics. It was an achievement sparked by players we've gotten to know at the major league level over the past few seasons—Skip Schumaker, Brandon Wood, Billy Butler, Jared Saltalamacchia, Michael Bourn and Mark Reynolds, to name a handful. To put a stamp on the qualifying tournament, Team USA beat Cuba, the 2004 Olympic gold medal winner, in the championship game.

That's the way things are supposed to go, right? After all, baseball is supposed to be America's game, its birthright. And yet Team USA wasn't even a part of the 2004 Games in Athens, Greece. Oh, there were American-born players in Athens, but they were of Greek descent and Greece, as the host nation, got a free ticket into the Games. "Besides being called up to the big leagues, it's one of the most memorable and exciting experiences I've ever had, base-

ballwise," says Orioles outfielder Nick Markakis, who was born in Glen Cove, N.Y., but led the Greek squad with a .346 batting average.

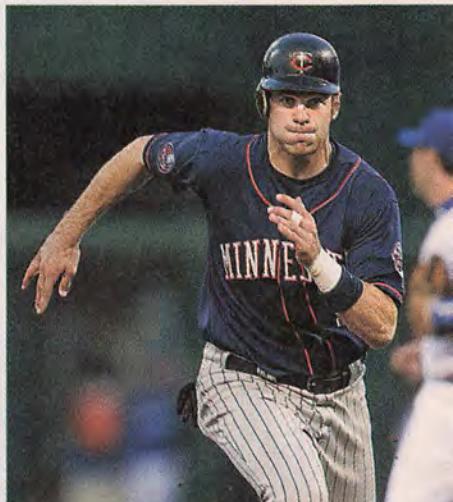
American players with no Greek ties, though, missed out on that memorable experience after a disastrous one at a 2003 Olympic qualifying event in Panama. Team USA swept through pool play with a 3-0 record (all shutouts) but lost to Mexico (0-3 in pool play), 2-1, and was eliminated from contention. Just like that, the team that had won the 2000 gold medal in Sydney, behind inspirational manager Tommy Lasorda and a gem of a final game by Ben Sheets, was out of the Games. At the time, it was shocking. Now, looking back nearly five years later, it's even more surprising. Every member of the 24-man roster has played in the big leagues since the 2003 disappointment.

The then-and-now lowdown on some of the bigger names from that squad:



OF Matt Holliday (1-for-7, 1 RBI in the tournament). He was one of the final additions to the squad after a so-so 2003 season at Class AA Tulsa. This tournament was about the last time he has struggled—he was called up to the big leagues in mid-April 2004 and hasn't hit under .290 in a season since. He was the catalyst for the Rockies' amazing run to the World Series last fall.

OF Grady Sizemore (3-for-13, 3 runs, 1 RBI). He started all four of Team USA's games and led off the ninth inning of the contest against Mexico with a single but was stranded at third. He has developed into one of the elite five-tool players in the major leagues, posting at least 22 homers and 22 steals for Cleveland in each of the past three seasons.



C Joe Mauer (3-for-11, 2 RBIs). Mauer pinch-hit in that fateful ninth inning, and manager Frank Robinson had him sacrifice Sizemore and first baseman Graham Koonce up to second and third. But a groundout and popup later and the Americans were done. Mauer made his Twins debut the next summer and took the baseball world by storm in 2006, carrying a .378 batting average into the All-Star break and eventually finishing sixth in the MVP voting.

SS J.J. Hardy (0-for-3). He was on the team solely for his glove, and he still had a great-glove, no-hit reputation entering last season. Not anymore. Not after a breakthrough '07 that included 26 homers and 80 RBIs primarily out of the No. 2 slot in the Brewers' batting order.



LHP Horacio Ramirez (5 innings, 1 hit, 0 earned runs against Colombia). When Phillies farmhand Cole Hamels had to back out with an injury, Ramirez took over the ace role for Team USA. He was coming off a 12-4 rookie season with the Braves and pitched well in his only start in Panama. He never was able to recapture the consistency of his rookie year and is pitching for Class AAA Omaha in the Royals' organization.

6 questions for Bob Watson, G.M. of Team USA

Like softball, baseball was voted off the 2012 Olympic island in 2005, a decision that will be revisited in 2009. In the meantime, Team USA general manager Bob Watson, along with manager Davey Johnson, is charged with leading the United States to Olympic glory after the team failed to make it to the Athens Games in 2004. The Americans have accomplished the first step by qualifying for Beijing. As part of the 2008 USOC Media Summit, Watson answered questions along a range of topics leading up to the Beijing Games.

1 What did you learn from the 2000 Olympics?

Pitching is the name of the game. We're going to have the best pitchers available to us. We've already made some calls to the (major league) ballclubs. ... It will be whoever throws the ball the best.

2 What about 2004?

The thing we learned most from not qualifying in '04 was to have some semblance of balance. As the G.M., it's my job to find that balance. Davey likes power. He likes speed. He likes balance. So we're all going down that path.

3 How are you going to select the team?

We'll take non-25-man (major league) roster players. We'll probably take players 28 to 40. There is an outside chance—a real outside chance—we'll take a collegiate player but mostly minor league players. We want to pick the players who are playing the best and hot right now to make the best team.

4 Will teams be hesitant to give up their best players during the season to the United States?

I know as a general manager sitting in that chair, it's going to be a very delicate spot for the teams to let me and the U.S. have their best pitcher. Instead of looking at player 26 or 27 (on a 25-man major league roster), we're looking at player 29.

5 What do you believe is the biggest problem the IOC has in not letting baseball in the Games?

To be honest with you, not sending our top athletes because of the timing of most Summer Olympics. Our sport has not shut down for a period to do this. Smarter guys than myself have been working on it. With anti-doping, Major League Baseball has come up with one of the toughest drug policies. I think that will go a long way in convincing the IOC we're serious about doping.

6 Do you think baseball and softball have to go in together to make a return in 2016?

They left together, so I'd like to see them go back together. They both play with balls, bats and bases. They should go hand in hand. Softball has done very well in competition. I'm glad our guys don't have to hit off of Jennie Finch.

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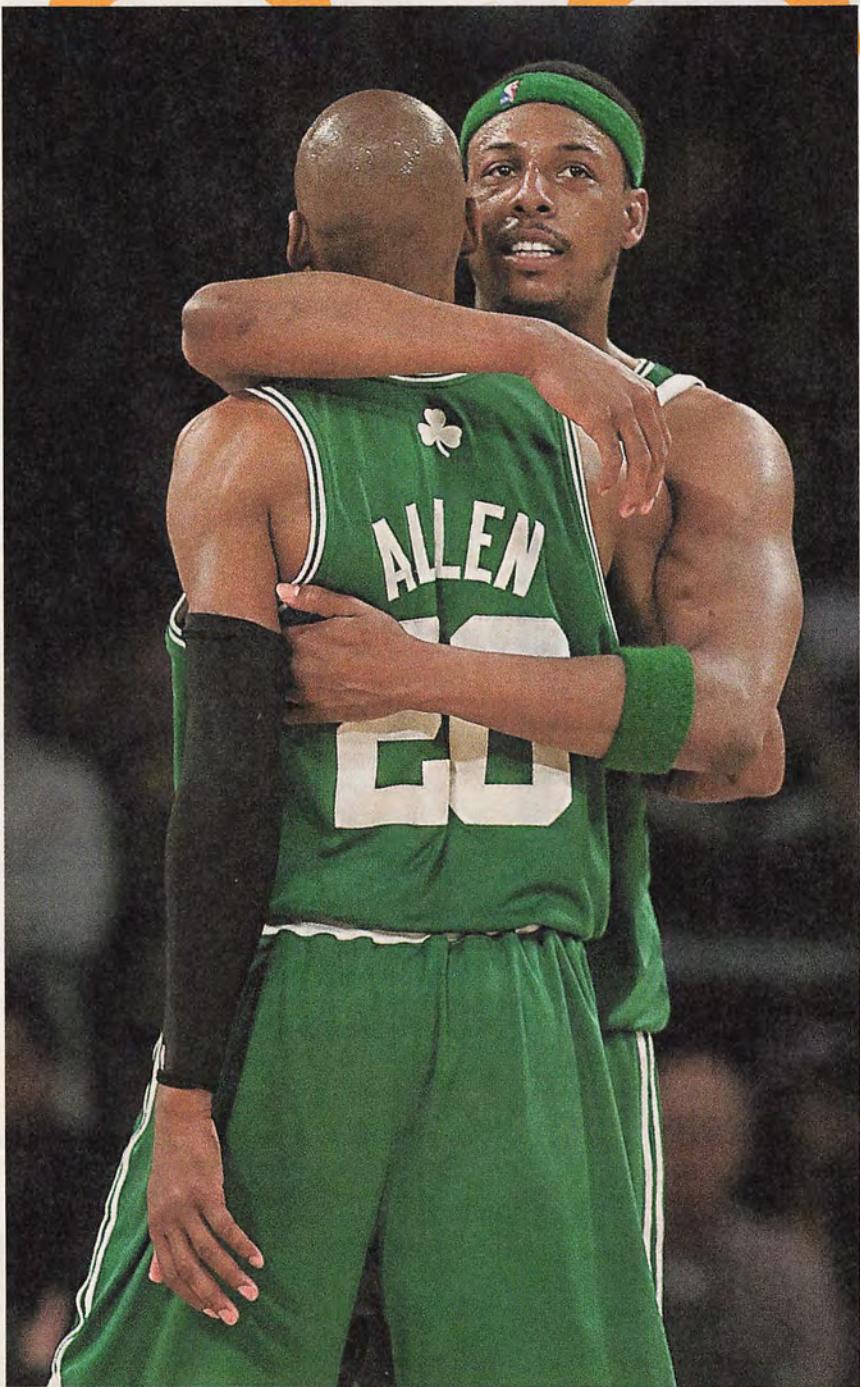
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Three-star tour

A talented trio.
A team crackling
with chemistry.
Jump on for the ride,
Boston fans—
you know the route.

By Stan McNeal

Allen, Pierce
and Garnett—all
onetime franchise
cornerstones—came
into the season with
one goal: to win their
first championship.





Visit Boston in the summer and you're likely to take a Duck Tour, a romp around town in an odd-looking vehicle that cruises land and water. Visit Boston at the conclusion of a professional sports season and you're almost as likely to see a championship team on its own Duck Tour victory parade.

Red Sox: check. Patriots: check (well, almost, this season—but still pretty darn often). And now probably the Celtics. After viewing a few of these parades from his downtown digs, Celtics coach Doc Rivers invited his three superstars—Paul Pierce, Kevin Garnett and Ray Allen—on their own Duck Tour last summer.

Garnett, unfamiliar with Boston traditions and Duck Tours, remembers the morning well.

"We got a call to be at his place at 8—you know, not leave your house at 8 but be at his house at 8," he says. "And it's the summer, so I don't think the three of us were real happy about that, but we finally got there. All of a sudden this boat, basically

on wheels, pulls up, and he was like, 'This is what we're going to do this morning.' I was looking at him like, *Are you serious? This could have waited till the sun came out, you know.*

"Anyway, we got on and he told us, 'This is the goal. Whenever you're successful in this city and you've won, this is what you take.'

Entering the week, the Celtics still needed one more victory to secure their ride along Storrow Drive and on the Charles River. The Lakers sent the series back to Boston with an impressive bounce-back victory in Game 5. Three days after blowing a 24-point lead—the biggest collapse in Finals history—L.A. grabbed another big early lead, and this time it managed to hang on.

The Celtics, winners of 16 NBA championships, were shooting to give Boston its fifth champion in a major pro sport in the past six years while, at the same time, looking to prove a couple of basketball adages.

Offense sells, but defense wins. The Celtics' defense, which was stingy all season, has been even more impressive in the playoffs. Boston held opponents to an average of 88.0 points after limiting them to 90.3 during the regular season. Kobe Bryant, who averaged 31.9 points in the first three rounds of the playoffs, managed 26.2 points on 37.6 percent shooting in the first five games against the Celtics.

While the Lakers lived down to their reputation of having more grace than grit, the Celtics pounded away. One play in the final 15.7 seconds of Game 4 typified the difference in the teams. The Celtics led

Pierce has tasted his share of bitter times during his time in Boston; now, he is determined to savor the sweeter side.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

Top 5 Candidates for a championship parade in 2009

1 Lakers. Give them credit for getting this far without Andrew Bynum. No other team—including the Celtics—would have gone so far without the guy who arguably is their second-best player.

2 Celtics. With the Pistons in need of retooling, Boston's road to The Finals should be even smoother next season. And you know Kevin Garnett will be hungry for more.

3 Hornets. They got closer than expected this year. Chris Paul will lead them even further next year.

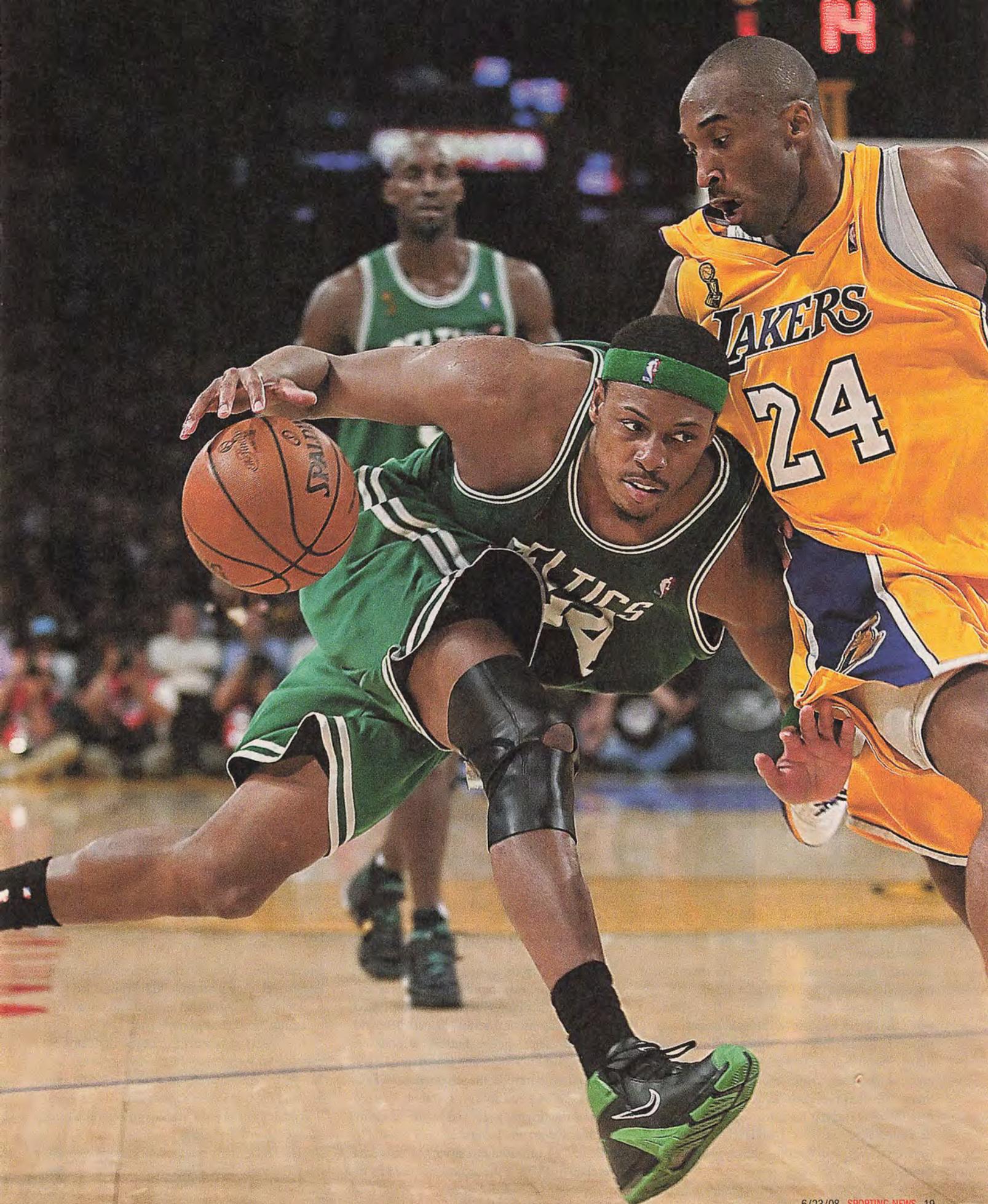
4 Spurs. The other old standbys—Suns, Mavericks and Pistons—will be breaking in new coaches, but San Antonio still has Gregg Popovich ... and Tim Duncan, Manu Ginobili and Tony Parker.

5 Cavaliers. LeBron James isn't going anywhere, and his team still plays in the East.

by three points. Allen, defended by Sasha Vujacic, held the ball near the top of the key. He waved off a screen by Garnett, then drove easily past Vujacic and cruised uncontested to the basket as Pau Gasol did nothing but watch. Ballgame. Vujacic and Gasol both took blame for the play, but the real point was this: No way would that have happened with Garnett defending under the basket.

One player—not even the MVP—cannot beat an entire team. The Lakers—who played so well throughout the Western Conference playoffs—have struggled on both ends against the Celtics. Bryant's teamwork and the general togetherness of the Lakers were lauded much of the season, but the team reverted to Kobe and Co. when things got tough.

The Celtics, even with their Big Three, developed a different kind of team chemistry from the first day of pickup games last September. "It's not the team with the best talent that wins," says backup point guard Sam Cassell. "It's the team with the best chemistry."

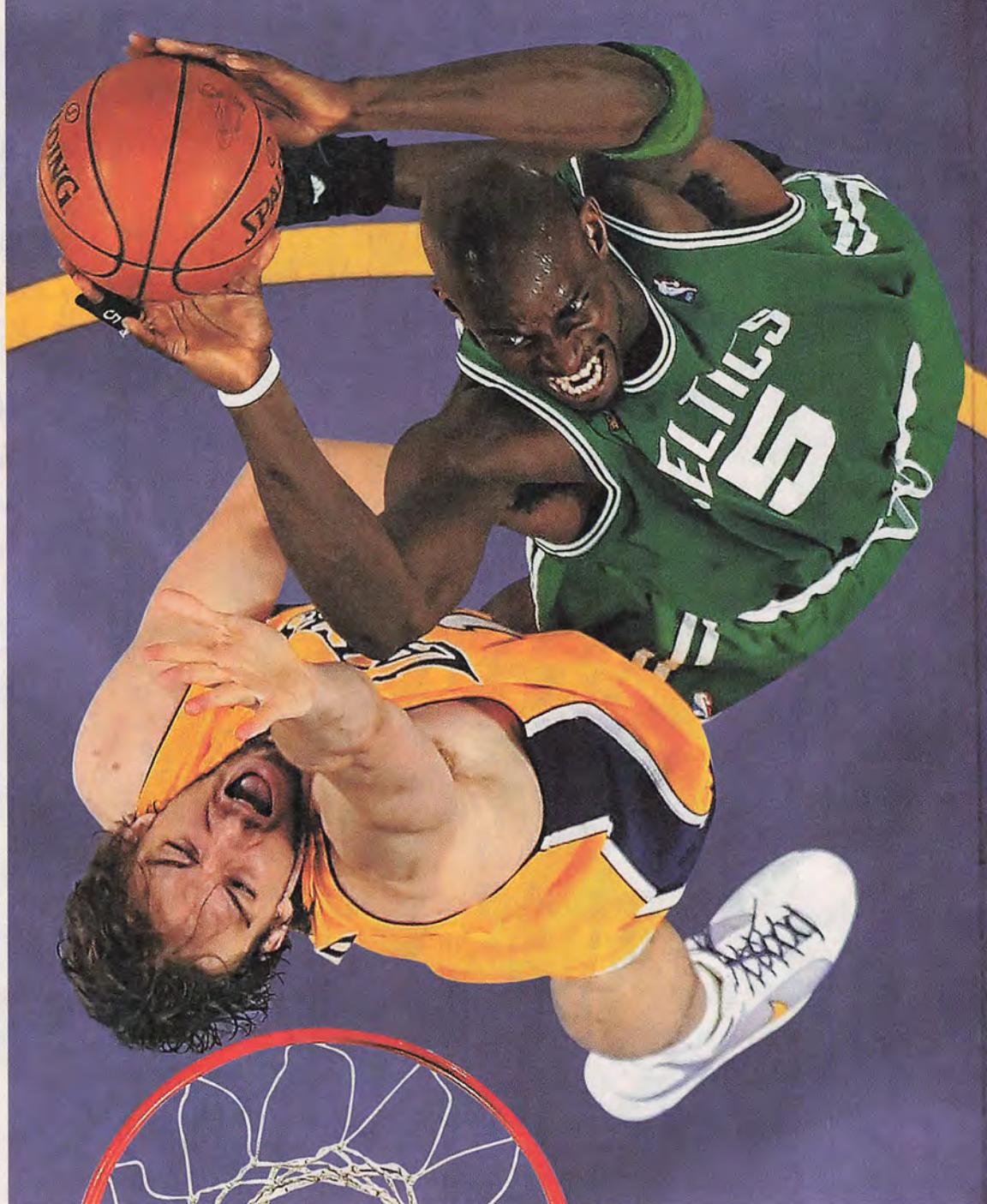


Credit general manager Danny Ainge not only for trading for Garnett and Allen last offseason but also for bringing in a group of veterans ready to buy into the program. Credit Garnett for setting the tone with his intensity and unselfishness. Credit Pierce and Allen for picking up their defense. Credit the role players for not complaining about their minutes when Rivers continued tinkering with his bench all the way to The Finals.

"After everyone had been signed, we started working out together and guys started hanging out together right away," says James Posey, one of the role players the team brought in on a one-year contract. "That's when we started to jell. You could tell when we'd do stuff like play cards that everyone was competitive, and all that just transferred over to the court."

But save a fair share of props for Rivers. He could have been fired last season after a 24-58 disaster that concluded with the team missing out on the No. 1 pick in the draft lottery. But Ainge knew the Celtics' losing season was a result of a poor roster, not a poor coach. Rivers never reached The Finals as a player, but his 13 years as one of the league's toughest point guards won him respect from his players. "Doc played this game," Cassell says. "He knows how to communicate with the players. A head coach needs respect from his players, and Doc has it."

Cassell recalls one practice, late in the season, when the Celtics had lost two straight games. The players all figured they were in for a hard couple of hours. Shortly before practice started, Rivers gathered the players at center court, then dismissed them. "We don't need to be here," Cassell remembers the coach telling his team. "Psychologically, he fooled all of us. And it worked." The Celtics went on to win 11 of their final 12 regular-season games.



Garnett's tenacity was too much for Gasol and the Lakers early in the series.

During the playoffs, Boston was taken to seven games in the first two rounds by the Hawks and Cavaliers—Celtics players repeatedly have talked about how the physical series against Cleveland helped them later—before finding its offensive rhythm against the Pistons and Lakers.

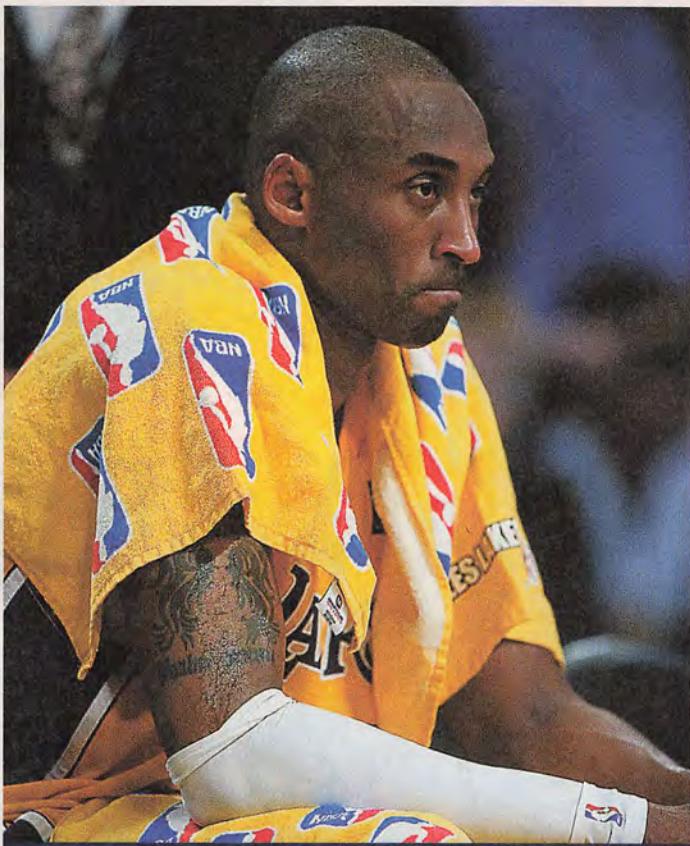
Boston took control of the series when the Lakers blew the 24-point lead in Game 4. Defense again was the driving force. Led by the suddenly hot Lamar Odom, the Lakers ran up 35 points to the Celtics' 14 in the first quarter but mustered fewer than that (38) in the second and third quar-

ters combined. Rivers' decision to go with a small lineup, including sparkplug Eddie House, led to a 57-33 second half run that Jackson said resulted in his team's "heart (being) ripped out."

The Lakers repaired their hearts by Game 5, running up even more points—39 to the Celtics' 22—in the first quarter. This time, L.A. did not fold and the first Lakers-Celtics Finals in 21 years headed into its second week with the odds still stacked against the Lakers.

That Duck Tour, needless to say, still was on hold. For a few days, at least.

SN



Bryant will bring the Lakers back—quietly

Don't look for Kobe Bryant ranting in any parking lots this summer, even if the Lakers fall short of their ultimate goal. He'll be too busy with the U.S. Olympic team, for one thing. But that's not the only reason:

He'll be honing his stand-up routine. At his press briefings during The Finals, win or lose, Bryant was full of happy talk.

On missing seven of 18 free throws in Game 3: "It felt like I was in a foreign territory because I haven't been there in so long. It's like somebody took me and just dropped me off in the middle of Shanghai with no translator and no dictionary. It was crazy."

On what he told the team at practice after the Lakers blew a 24-point lead and lost Game 4: "I borrowed Phil's peace pipe. We had a big kumbaya meeting."

On trying to rally the Lakers in Game 2, when they nearly overcame a 24-point deficit in the fourth quarter: "Get our beep in gear. Play beep harder, a bunch of other beeps. It's beep, beep, beep, beep, beep. Eddie Murphy Raw times 10."

He's growing up. Though no one would be exactly stunned if Bryant reverted to immature ways, he said throughout the playoffs that he has learned his lesson about trying to play general manager. Last summer, Bryant was videotaped going off on Lakers G.M. Mitch Kupchak and owner Jerry Buss and imploring the Lakers to include Andrew Bynum in a deal for Jason Kidd.

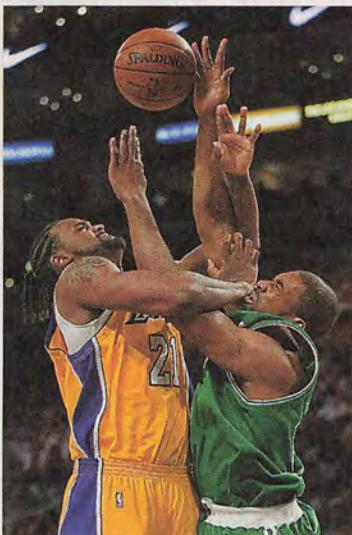
Bynum will be back. The 20-year-old center missed the final three months of the regular season and the playoffs following knee surgery. He said last week that he still is a couple of weeks away from getting serious about his rehab but hopes to be ready by October.

If Bynum returns at full strength—which can't be considered a certainty at this point—the Lakers will be able to start dual 7-footers in Bynum and Pau Gasol, plus 6-10 forward Lamar Odom. That should be enough front-line help to make Bryant happy. Enough to keep him out of parking lots, anyway. —S.M.

Finals 3-pointers

Numbers edition

31 Years since a team (Bill Walton's Trail Blazers in 1976-77) won the title one year after failing to reach the playoffs. The Celtics could do it this year; the Blazers, who will welcome aboard 2007 No. 1 pick Greg Oden, could do it next year.



6 Years since a team that averaged at least 100 points in the regular season won the title. And you thought the Celtics were all about defense.

10 Points Kobe Bryant scored in the last three quarters of the Lakers' Game 5 victory, offering more proof that L.A. is a better team when he doesn't have to carry the entire load.

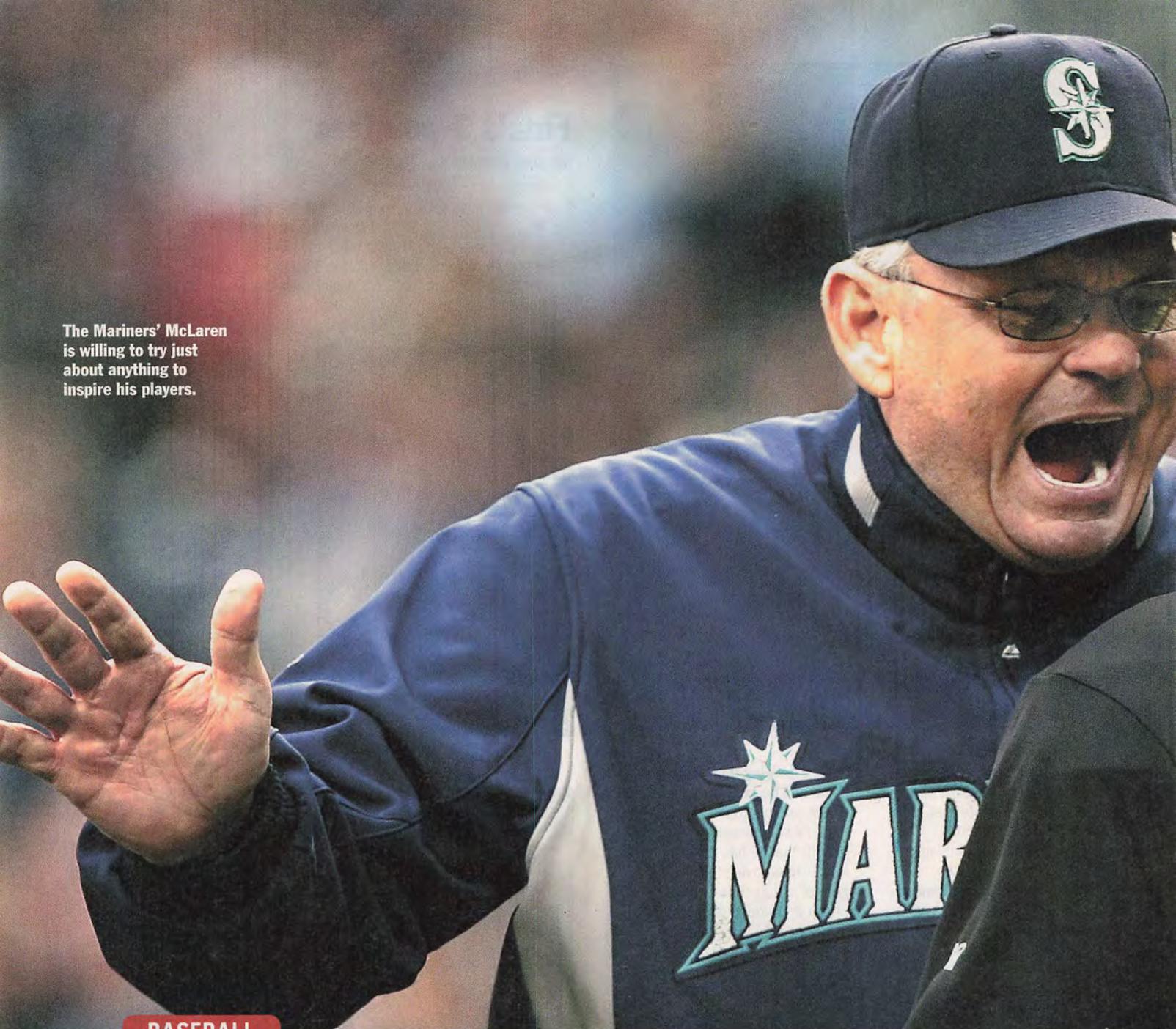
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The Mariners' McLaren
is willing to try just
about anything to
inspire his players.

BASEBALL

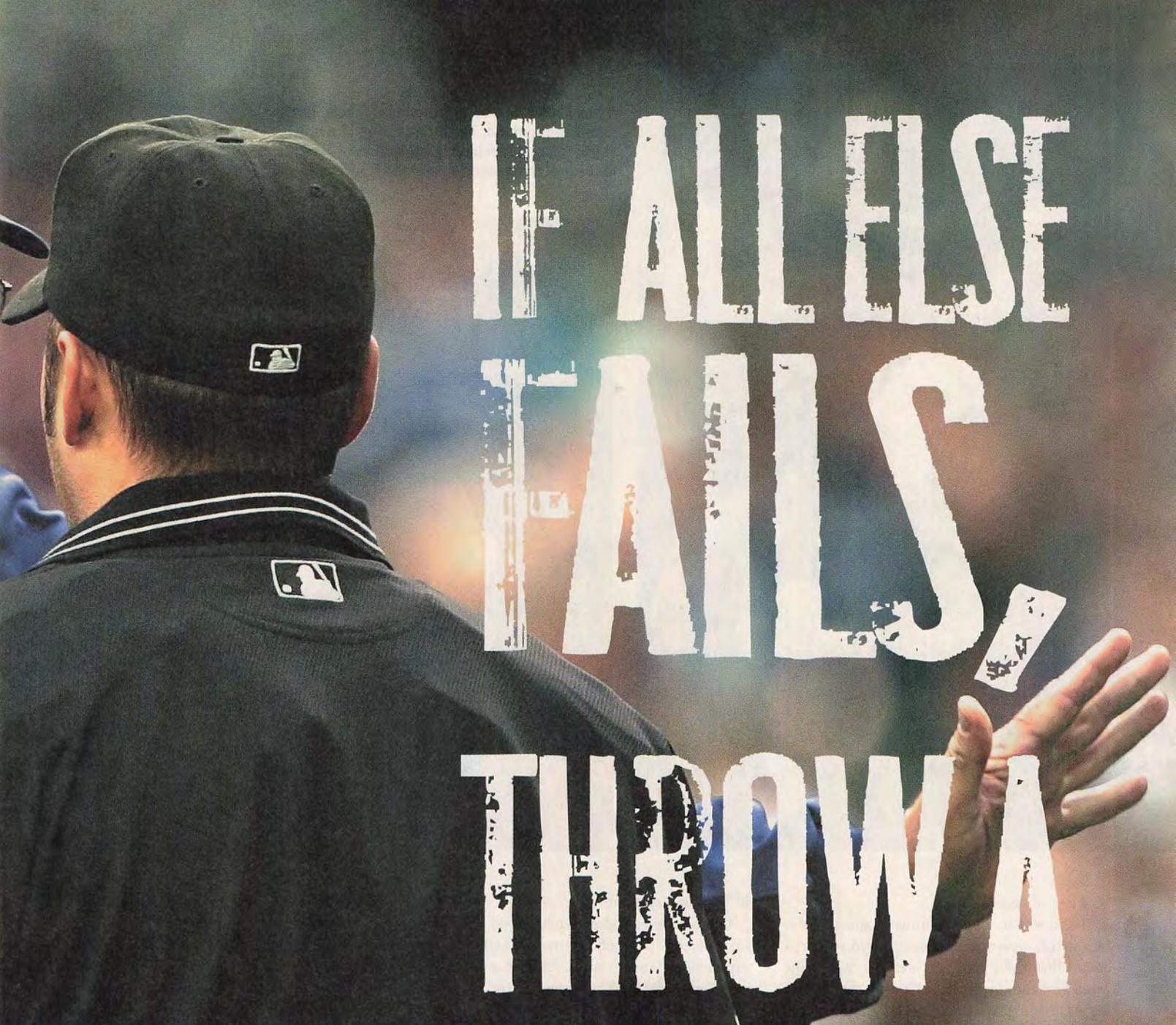
**When a team goes south,
a managerial
tongue-lashing may
provide new direction—
or perhaps it will take a
trade, or luck, or patience ...
or maybe there
is no answer**

By Sean Deveney

Seems this would be a good time to point out the unwritten guidelines to a good, salty, managerial freakout, the sort that sure is popular these days. A proper tirade should come unrehearsed, an unforeseen reaction to a reasonable question or notion. The 1993 telephone-tossing, tape recorder-flipping meltdown by Royals manager Hal McRae—asked innocently about using George Brett as a pinch hitter in that night's

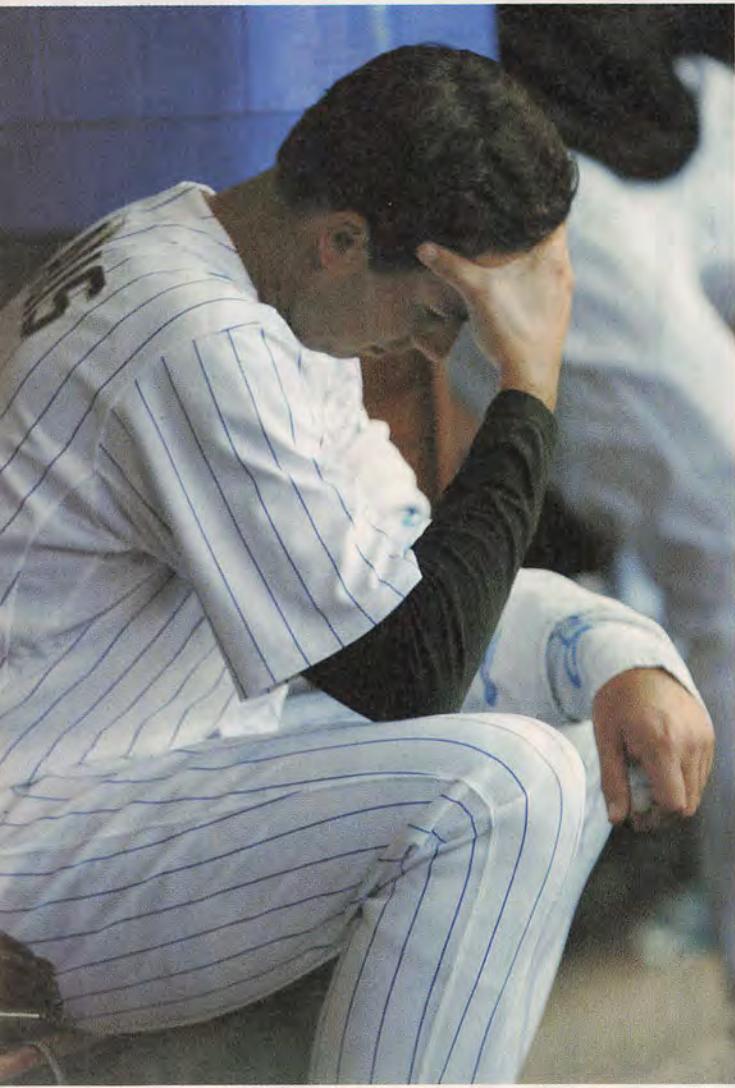
game—is a perfect example. It should have an erratic quality, like the 1983 classic by Cubs manager Lee Elia, who let loose a stream-of-consciousness assessment of the employment status of North Side fans: "They ought to go out and get a (bleeping) job and find out what it's like to earn a (bleeping) living." And there should be bleeps aplenty. See Earl Weaver's body of work.

Contrast two of our most recent examples of managerial tongue-lashings. Last month, Detroit manager Jim Leyland,

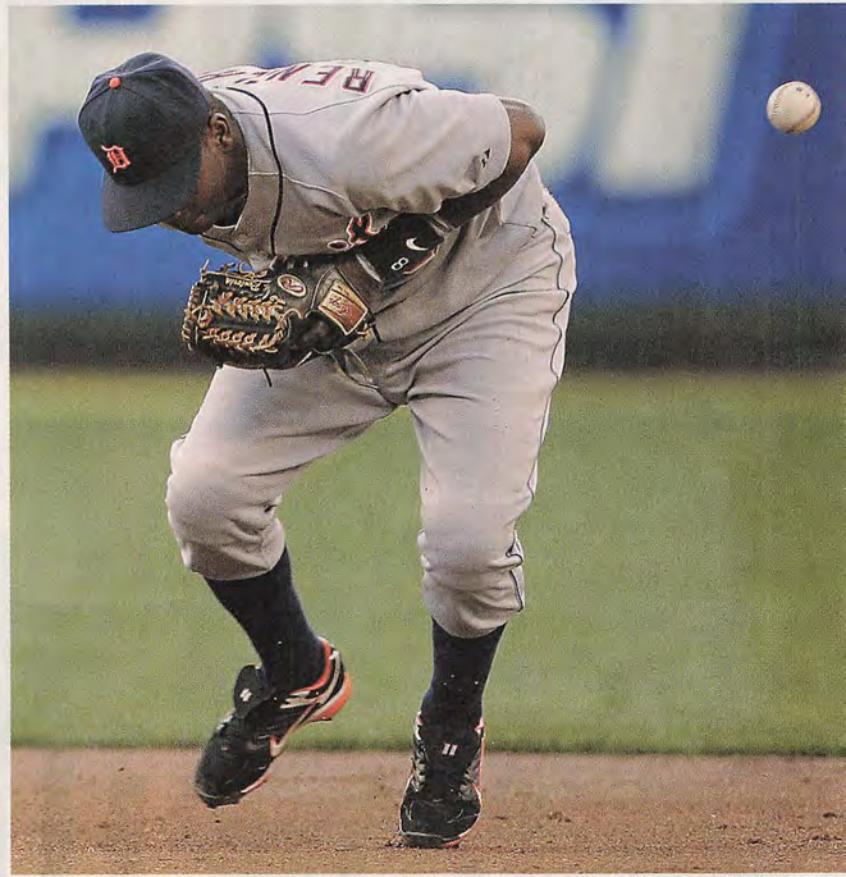


IF ALL ELSE FAILS THROW A TANTRUM

responding to comments by former Tigers reliever Jason Grilli (who noted that the clubhouse atmosphere had changed for the worse in Detroit), got himself into a legitimate lather, speaking rationally, then slowly building to a steam-out-of-the-ears crescendo. In one 80-second span, Leyland let loose 29 profanities, claiming that he was done "protecting" players but not elaborating on what, exactly, that meant. Leyland was at his foul-mouthed best and sounded just weird enough to make you sure he meant



It has been a season of frowning (Francis, Rockies), fumbling (Renteria, Tigers), faltering (Balentien, Mariners) and flinching (Paul McAnulty, Padres) for four of the majors' preseason favorites.



what he had said.

The June 4 tirade of Mariners manager John McLaren, however, came off as contrived. McLaren denied that it was. Still, McLaren is a mild-mannered guy, and it was already known that, before the Mariners played the Angels that evening, McLaren and his coaches had gotten a verbal thumping from team president Chuck Armstrong. Also, general manager Bill Bavasi had quashed the players' usual spread of postgame food and beer (that's mean), forcing them to stand at their lockers and take questions from the media (that's downright cruel). So when McLaren let fly an address to the media packed with four-letter words, it sounded scripted, like some inspirational commencement speech given to the graduating class of the Bluebeard School for Drunken Pirates. "We've got to (bleeping) buckle it up and get after

it!" McLaren said. Yar!

On some level, Padres manager Bud Black can understand what set off Leyland and McLaren: big expectations, small results. Detroit and Seattle were considered top-tier contenders this year after making major additions—shortstop Edgar Renteria, third baseman-turned-first baseman Miguel Cabrera and pitcher Dontrelle Willis in Detroit, pitchers Erik Bedard and Carlos Silva in Seattle. Detroit's opening day payroll was \$138.7 million (second-highest in baseball), and Seattle's was \$117.9 million (ninth). Black didn't get a big talent upgrade or a payroll increase, but he did have a team returning that had tied for the wild card and missed the playoffs only after losing a heartbreakng one-game showdown to the Rockies last season. Like the Tigers and Mariners, the Padres entered the season with expectations, too. And,

like the Tigers and Mariners, they plain stunk in the early going.

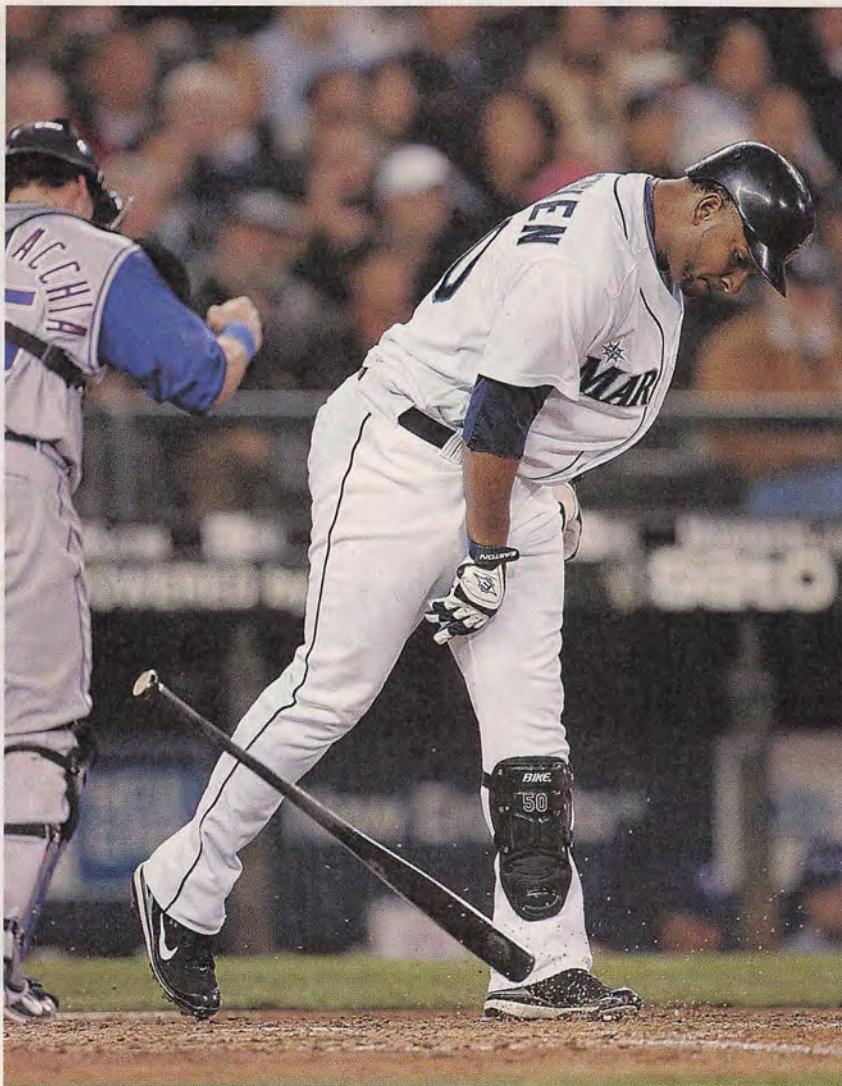
So, why no tirade? Black shrugs. If he's going to get angry with players—and he does from time to time—he does it behind closed doors. Still, sitting in the home dugout recently, Black thought about his recent behavior, looking for something that might qualify as a rampage. "A couple of weeks ago, someone said I was terse," Black said, turning to look at Padres media relations director Warren Miller. "Terse, I think it was, right?"

"No," Miller said. "I said you were pissed."

"Well, there you go," Black said. "I thought you said terse."

Black would have had good cause to be terse or, um, ticked. On May 19, the Padres had a 16-30 record, the worst mark in the majors, and were 13 games behind N.L. West-leading Arizona. The

GENERAL MANAGER BILL BAVASI HAD QUASHED THE PLAYERS' USUAL SPREAD OF POSTGAME FOOD AND BEER [THAT'S MEAN].



Tigers were last in the A.L. Central at 17-27, and the Mariners were on the bottom of the A.L. West at 18-27. Also in that low-level mix: Colorado, another big-expectation bunch, author of the most magical run in history last fall when it won 21 of 22 to earn a trip to the World Series. The Rockies were also off to an 18-27 start.

Some teams stink because they plain stink, but just over a quarter of the way through the season, this foursome—San Diego, Detroit, Colorado and Seattle—carried the added stench of underachievement about them. Says the Mariners' forlorn Bavasi: "We went into spring training thinking, 'We can win.' " They all did. But there they were, four of the worst teams in baseball.

This is the cold reality of the standings. It's a zero-sum game. There can't be 30 pleasant surprises. When a team unexpectedly soars, another

unexpectedly plummets. The byproduct of feel-good stories like the Rays, White Sox, Marlins and A's are feel-bad stories like the Mariners, Tigers, Rockies and Padres.

It's at times like May 19, at the very bottom, but with a long way to go, that teams must begin to do two things. First, figure out what the heck went wrong. Then, they've got to address this small matter: What now?

Each of our four early tumblers had unique problems, and each has, to varying degrees, shown signs of solving those problems. A recent five-game Padres winning streak helped cut Arizona's lead over San Diego in half. The Rockies followed an eight-game losing streak by winning six of seven. The

Tigers split a series with the Indians, then swept a three-game series with the White Sox. Even the Mariners managed to win a series in Toronto last week.

Look closely at teams that failed to meet lofty expectations in the early season and you can see similarities. "Sometimes," says Padres outfielder Brian Giles, "it seems like luck is never going to go your way. For the whole team." Giles would know. In late May, he watched star pitcher Chris Young have his nose broken and skull cracked by a line drive off the bat of St. Louis' Albert Pujols, then watched Pujols—with no ill intent—slide into home two batters later, badly spraining catcher Josh Bard's ankle. One player sent San Diego's entire battery to the disabled list. So, yes, bum luck has played a part. More than luck, though, there seem to be common elements that make up

FORCING PLAYERS TO STAND AT THEIR LOCKERS AND TAKE QUESTIONS FROM THE MEDIA [THAT'S DOWNRIGHT CRUEL].

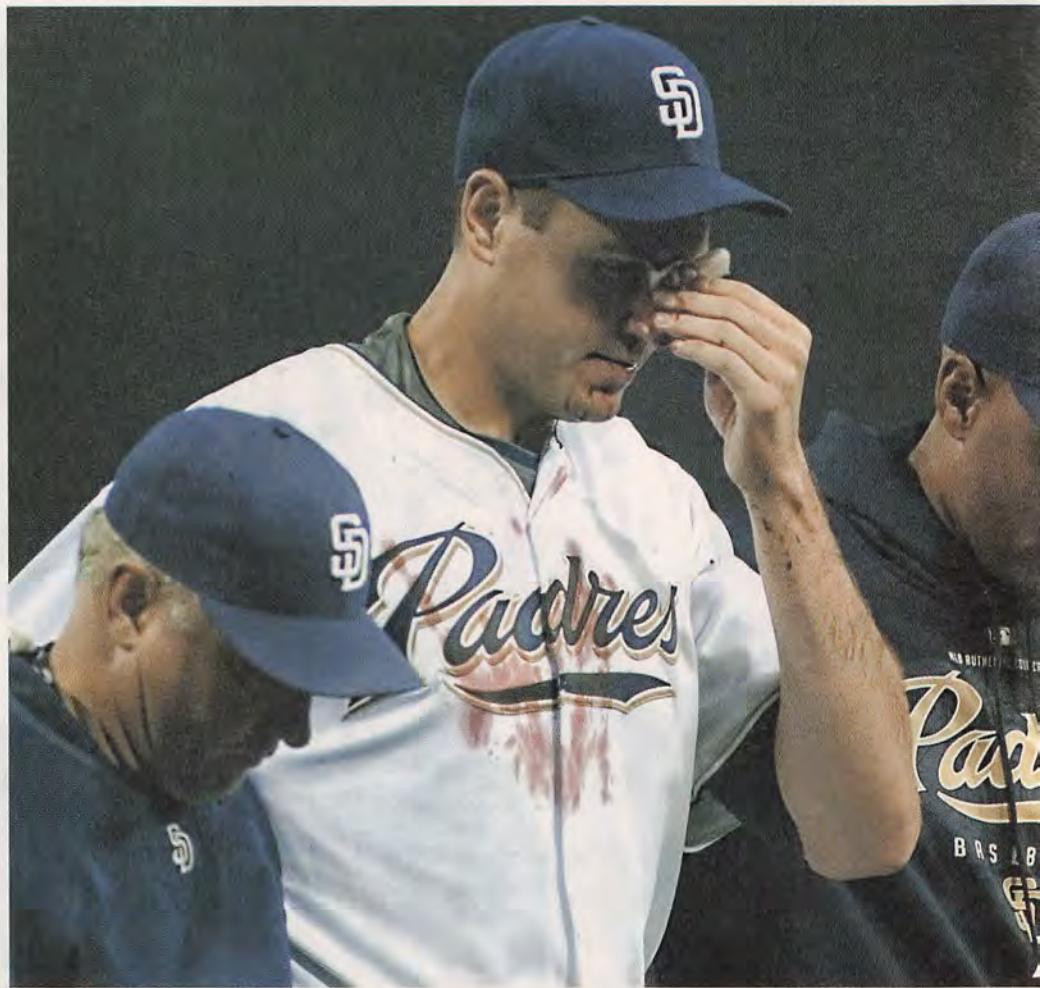
a truly disappointing early season.

■ **The big ouch.** Gary Sheffield and Curtis Granderson in Detroit. Cy Young award winner Jake Peavy and Young in San Diego. J.J. Putz and Bedard in Seattle. Troy Tulowitzki and Matt Holliday in Colorado. Pretty big names. All have spent time on the 15-day disabled list this year.

■ **The 'what's-the-matter-with-that-guy' season.**

One of the few reliables in the Mariners' wet-noodle lineup should be designated hitter Jose Vidro, who had a .302 career average entering this season. But, says one scout, "His bat is slow, his swing is long, and he's just not making contact the way he has in the past." Seattle's DH is batting just .223 with five home runs. Padres shortstop Khalil Greene, the team's MVP in '07, is at .225 with six homers. The numbers for Detroit's Willis are absurd—five appearances, 11½ innings, 21 walks, five strikeouts (oh, and three years, \$29 million—the contract he got in the offseason). Willis, though, was just the Tigers' No. 5 starter before being demoted all the way to Class A last week. Things are tougher for the Rockies, who were hard up for pitching even before their ace, Jeff Francis, went 2-6 with a 5.49 ERA in his first 14 starts.

■ **RISP-y business.** Detroit is 14th in the majors in batting average with runners in scoring position, a woeful number for a lineup that was projected to be an offensive powerhouse. But it's the best you'll find among this foursome. The Padres are 27th. The Rockies are 29th, ahead of only (of course) the Mariners. This lack of timely hitting seems to fit the notion that disappointing teams are victims of bad luck. But Padres general manager Kevin Towers has a more blunt assessment. "It means we don't have depth in our lineup," he says. "The guys we expect to get on base in the first four spots are, but past the cleanup spot, we have holes. The bottom half is not performing." He's right. The Padres' 5-8 hitters are batting .206, .224, .260 and .207. The same thing happens in long stretches at the bottom of the Detroit and Colo-



rado lineups and in spots 4-8 for Seattle.

■ **The limping cavalry.** With Sheffield injured, the Tigers called up slugger Jeff Larish, who had hit 16 home runs in Class AAA. Larish struck out 11 times in his first 37 big league at-bats, hitting .162. The Mariners went through much the same thing when they tried to boost the offense with top prospects Vladimir Balentien and Jeff Clement.

Didn't work. Nor has the Rockies' attempt to plug 2006 first-round pick Greg Reynolds into the rotation. If you need to dip into your second level of players and they don't produce, trouble looms.

■ **The regrettable offseason transaction.** The Rockies had no intention of keeping Kazuo Matsui when he hit free agency last winter, though he hit .288, stole 32 bases in 36 attempts and helped out the pitching staff tremendously with his glove. That decision is hurting the Rockies. Colorado has gone through six players at second base. The Mariners have looked the sucker in the deal that brought Bedard from Baltimore, and the Padres are regretting the missed chances—on Mike Cameron, Milton Bradley and Kosuke Fukudome—that forced them to patch the outfield with since-released Jim Edmonds. The Tigers, of course, are regretting every day between November 1 and February 1.

■ **The regrettable in-season transaction.** The Mariners dumped Brad Wilkerson to bring up Balentien, and in Toronto, Wilkerson is batting 44 points better than Balentien. The Padres cut ties with Edmonds, and he's now a productive platoon man for the Cubs. Grilli, the player who sparked Leyland's rant, was cut by the Tigers but now has a 3.03 ERA for Colorado, having stranded 12 of 16 inherited runners.

IN SO MANY WORDS, ELIA WAS, UH, PEEVED

When Cubs manager Lee Elia dropped two f-bombs in a three-word sequence early in a postgame news conference on April 29, 1983, it was a pretty good clue he was steamed.

As it turned out, Elia was just honing his oratorical skills. In what proved to be a rant-and-rave tour de force—a condensed version lives on today on the Internet—he exploded those f-bombs and other would-you-believe-what-he-just-said obscenities at a pace that jarred the senses, if not the sensibilities, of anyone within earshot.

The target of Elia's ire: Cubs fans who were booing and heaping verbal abuse upon his 5-14 team. (Expletive deleted) fans who, he said, made Wrigley Field an (expletive deleted) playground because they didn't have (expletive deleted) jobs and thereby "could come out to day baseball."

When general manager Dallas Green heard about the outburst—and read expurgated versions of it in newspaper accounts the next day—he said Elia's job was in jeopardy.

Elia had clearly alienated the fans, but he apparently won over his players, who went on a 33-25 run that moved the Cubs into contention in their division. And Green cooled his heels—until, that is, the team regressed after the All-Star break. With the club's record at 54-69 three weeks into August, Elia heard a word that even made him wince: Fired. —Joe Hoppel



Things got ugly early for Young. First his ERA took a beating, then he did.

Depending on how things turn, big changes could come as baseball's trading deadline nears. Probably not for Detroit, which dealt eight young players to get Cabrera, Willis and Renteria and is hamstrung by having doled out big contracts to most of its aging players. Leyland has shaken up the lineup—only three spots in the batting order are the same as they were on opening day. But for the others, it's a quandary. How far out do you have to be before you start selling and rebuilding with prospects? A tear-down is tempting, but, remember, Colorado was eight games out on July 2 last season and stormed into the World Series.

Seattle seems hopeless. As Bavasi told reporters after the McLaren hullabaloo, "People would have thought he was justified if he chain-locked the doors to the clubhouse and set it on fire." Bavasi has been looking into trades to salvage the season (and his job), but the market is bare now. Think about it: If even Seattle is still trying to compete, if even the downtrodden Mariners are not throwing in the towel, then what team would be?

Perhaps Colorado. The team's recent hot streak notwithstanding, the Rockies will have tough choices ahead, starting with their best player, Holliday. He can become a free agent after next season, and it's a near certainty that Holliday won't sign a long-term bargain deal. The Rockies must consider trading Holliday while his value is high. Beyond him, Colorado has plenty of bait: starter Aaron Cook, reliever Brian Fuentes, third baseman Garrett Atkins and outfielder Willy Taveras. "If they fall out, that's fertile ground," says one executive. "They're not going to be looking to deal junk. Even if they think they have a chance (at the playoffs), they could be very active."

The Padres, Towers says, will be patient. Peavy returned last week. Young should be ready in a month or so. Closer Trevor Hoffman has recovered from a rough start, and the rest of the bullpen—the team's backbone—has gotten into order. The lineup isn't producing, but in cavernous Petco Park, that's nothing new. "Arizona and the rest of the division has come back to us," Towers says. "That's what matters. I'd like to be five games back by the All-Star break. If we're there, we're in good shape. I don't look at being over .500. That doesn't matter. I want to be within five games of first place, that's all. Five games can change fast."

If these teams can pull themselves out of their respective funks, if they can vault into contention, that will mean some hot teams will take the fall. And when they do, we could see another good tirade or two. "This has been going on as long as there have been managers and players," Black says. "This didn't just start now. It's just, it's right there for public consumption."

With a straight face, Black adds, "I remember this one time, Miller Huggins, he went off. That was a big one, he really had the ass that day. John McGraw, too. Connie Mack, one time, he loosened his tie and really let them have it. He even threw the tie aside and, wow. He had the ass that day, too."

Mack, of course, retired in 1950 at the age of 87. Huggins and McGraw retired long before that.

Bleeping brilliant.

SN

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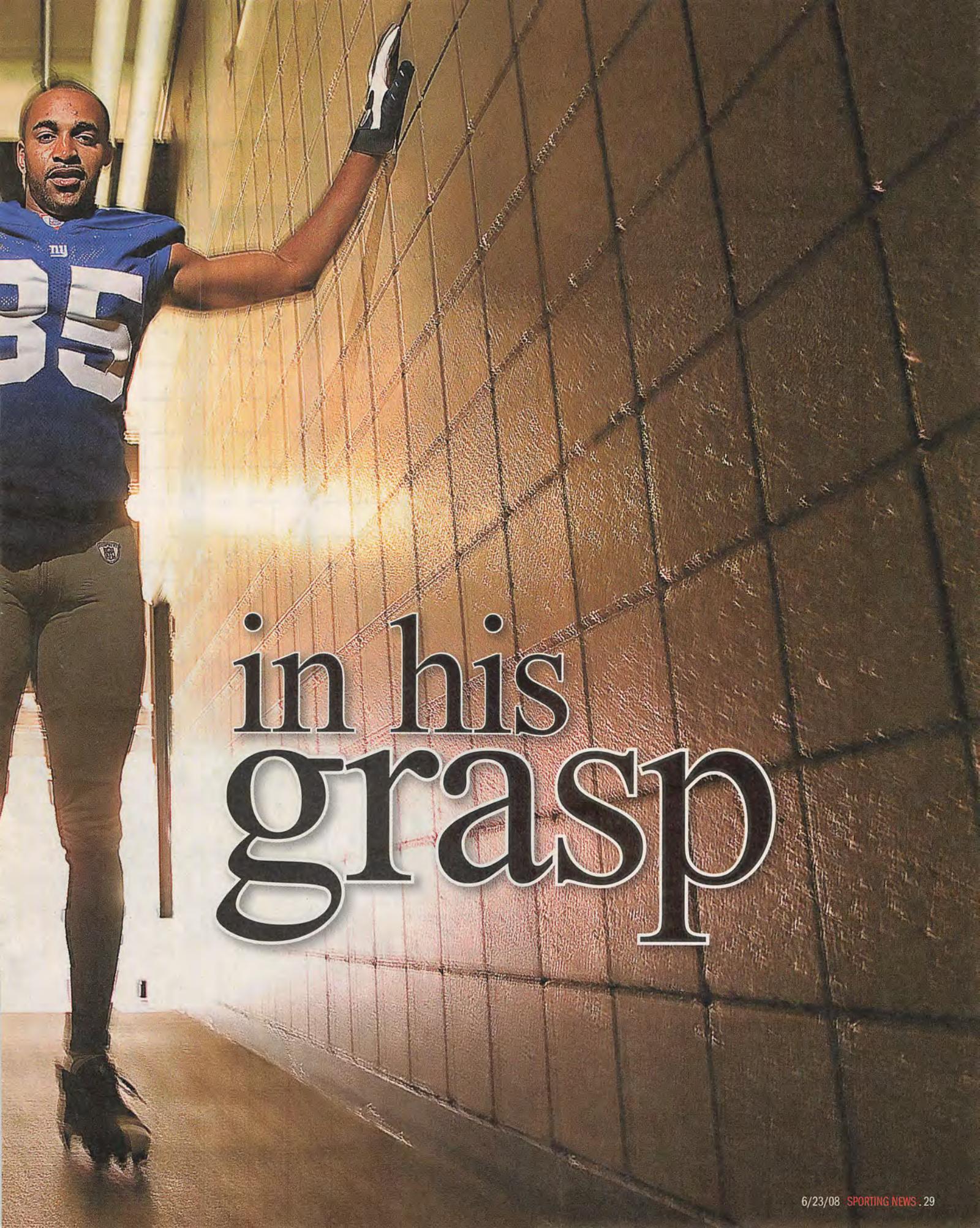
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NFL

The only thing
more stunning than
David Tyree's
Super Bowl catch
is the way the Giants'
receiver has turned
around his life

The . miracles

By Dennis Dillon
Photos by Albert Dickson



**in his
grasp**

THIS

is where

David Tyree's life changed:

inside a Pentecostal church in Bloomfield, N.J.

Right about here—in an end chair halfway down the middle aisle in the Bethel Church of Love and Praise—is where he was sitting when he had his epiphany on March 14, 2004. He had entered this house of worship a sinner. Walked in arm in arm with the devil himself. A drinker, a womanizer, a dope dealer—David Tyree wore all those hats.

Less than two weeks before, he had spent 24 hours in jail after being stopped by the police and charged with possession of marijuana with intent to distribute. As he sat in a holding cell in Fort Lee, N.J., separated from freedom by a locked door with the smallest of windows, he imagined news of his arrest scrolling across the bottom of the TV on ESPN—*dumb-dumb-dumb, dumb-dumb-dumb*—disgracing his family, his Giants teammates and his community. He cried out for help.

God, I don't know what to do. All I know is I need you.

When Tyree was released, the first message on his cell phone was from his estranged girlfriend, Leilah Bell, who was living in Syracuse with their son, Teyon, and working as a nurse. She had texted Tyree that she was pregnant. Lord, how had his life turned so upside down?

Now, as he sat in church, his plea to God was about to be answered.

*THIS is where
David Tyree's life changed:*

under a dome in the Arizona desert

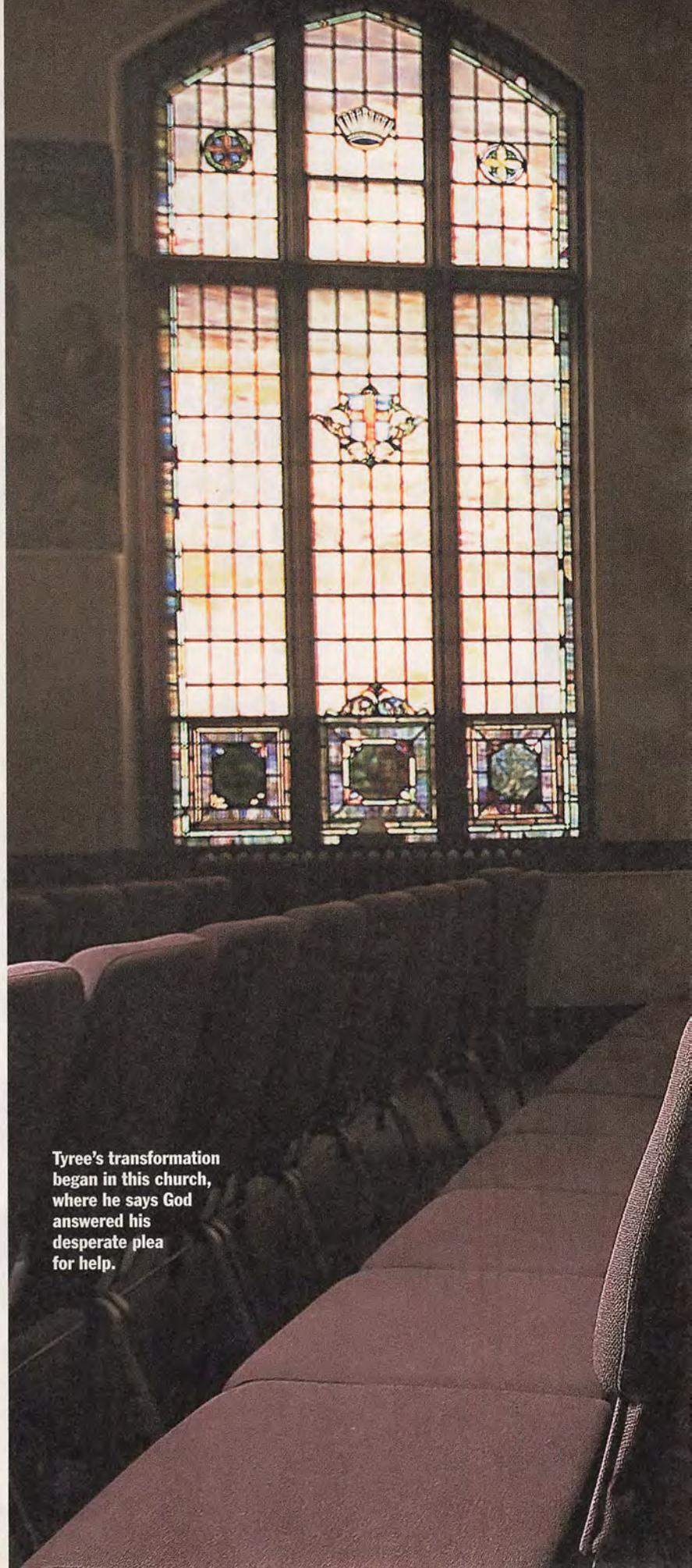
The Giants trailed the Patriots, 14-10, with 1:15 left in Super Bowl 42. Facing third-and-5 at their 44, they came out in a four-wide receiver formation with Tyree split to the right, rookie Steve Smith in the right slot, Amani Toomer in the left slot and Plaxico Burress split to the left. Quarterback Eli Manning stood 5 yards back in shotgun formation.

At the snap, Tyree ran a post, essentially a “dummy” route, hoping to draw coverage from cornerback Asante Samuel and the safety on that side. Smith, the primary receiver, ran a deep out toward the sideline. He was open and could have caught a pass for a first down and stopped the clock by getting out of bounds. But Manning was in a heap of trouble.

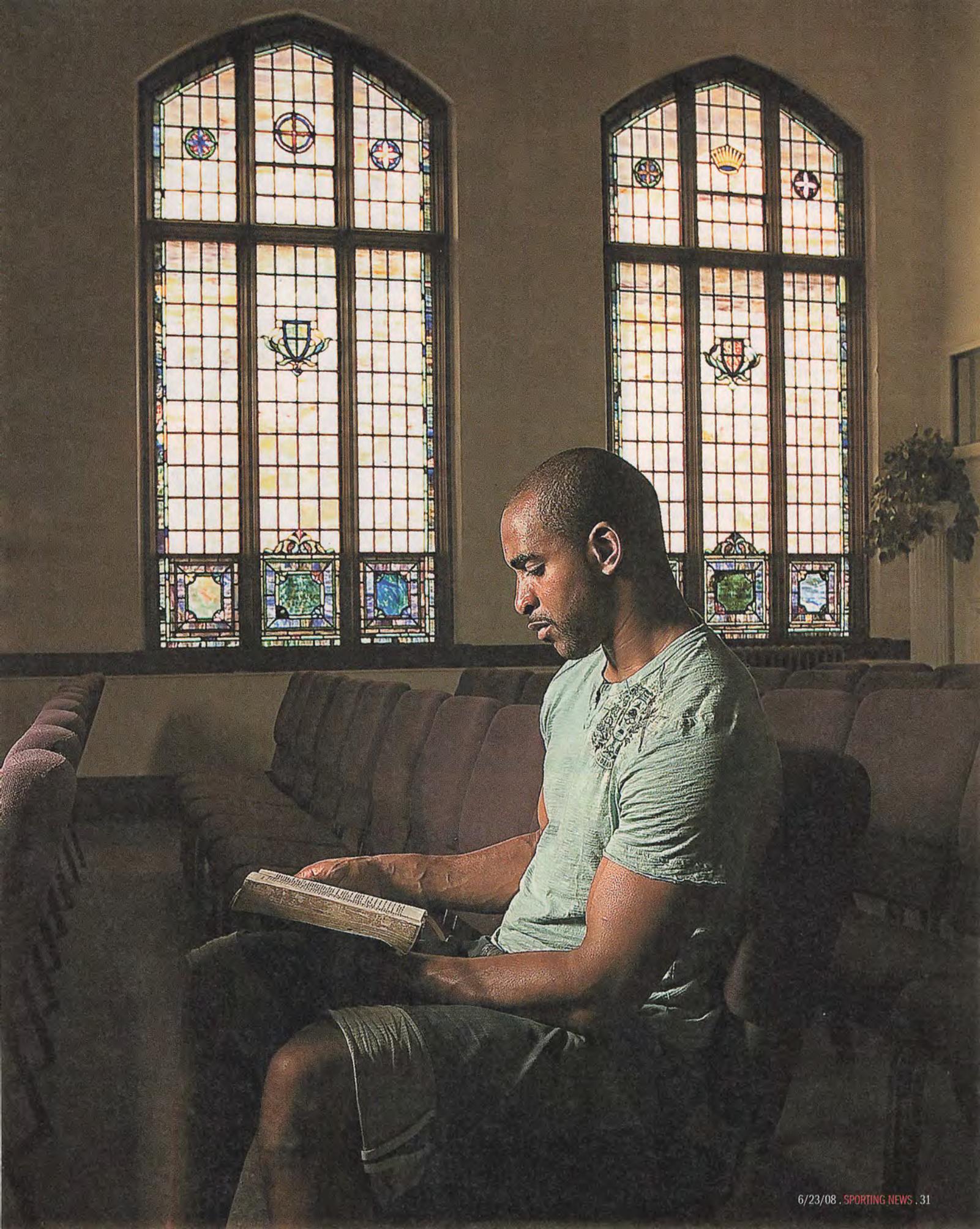
As Manning stepped up in the pocket, a mass of humanity engulfed him. Linebacker Adalius Thomas came around from behind, getting a piece of Manning’s jersey. Lineman Jarvis Green grabbed Manning’s jersey twice—first with his left hand, then with his right. Somehow, Manning eluded all the extended limbs—Houdini never executed a better escape—and retreated to the 33, where he wound up to pass.

When Tyree turned and saw Manning in trouble, he thought, *Oh, no.* He aborted his route at the 20 and started working his way back toward his quarterback, looking for a void in the coverage. “I felt open,” he says, “but I knew it wouldn’t last long.”

The two players made eye contact and Manning unleashed



**Tyree's transformation
began in this church,
where he says God
answered his
desperate plea
for help.**



a rainbow that traveled 43 yards. Tyree, standing at the Pats' 24, set his feet and prepared to jump like he had never jumped before.

THIS is how
David Tyree's life changed:

by the grace of God.

Born in Livingston, N.J., Tyree had something of a hardscrabble life. He was 1 when his parents, Jesse and Thelma, divorced. When he was 10, Thelma moved Tyree and his two older sisters to Montclair, where they lived in a one-bedroom house. Thelma slept in the bedroom, David had the living room and his sisters took the dining room.

It was an unbridled environment. Thelma didn't force her children to go to church, and she allowed alcohol and marijuana to be used in the house. Her rationalization: She would rather have her kids drink and smoke in front of her than somewhere out on the street.

Tyree was 14 and in eighth grade when he first tried alcohol. By the time he was a junior wide receiver at Montclair High, he imbibed almost every weekend, especially during the football season. His regular routine after a game was to drink 40 ounces of malt liquor, smoke a blunt, then chase it down with a half-pint of Jack Daniel's. "I was getting it in, brother," he says.

When Tyree went to Syracuse University to play football, things turned worse. He started having blackouts as a freshman. After a night of binge drinking, he would wake up and not know where he was or recall who he was with and what he had done.

"I remember waking up and looking at my clothes; they were muddy," Tyree says. "I remember waking up naked, not knowing what the heck happened. *Had I slept with somebody?* There were so many scary situations. It wasn't something I liked, but that was a part of my character. It didn't hinder my performance on the field, so I felt justified doing it."

By the time the Giants selected Tyree in the sixth round of the draft in April 2003, he had broken up with Leilah—she no longer could deal with his lifestyle—although they continued to see each other as friends. Tyree had a promising rookie season. He played in every game, starting the last three, led the team in special teams tackles and was selected as the special teams player on *Pro Football Weekly's* all-rookie team.



>This is ... David Tyree

Favorite meal: Bistec, a thin, Spanish-style steak sauteed in onions and garlic.

His ride: A 2005 black Cadillac Escalade.

Unique things in his locker: A wooden cross made in Jerusalem and a Jesus coffee cup that he uses to drink tea.

Favorite childhood memory: When his father came by and took him to the ice cream shop.

Hidden talent: "I would like to think bowling. I don't go over 200 consistently, but I've done it a fair amount."

Favorite TV show: *Entourage*.

Sports hero growing up: Jerry Rice.

After his football career is finished: He would like to get into public speaking, TV or radio.

Three people he would like to have dinner with: Jesus Christ, Martin Luther King and comedian-actor Chris Tucker.

His wife makes his life better because: "I'm incomplete without her."

On March 2, 2004, after picking up a new supply of marijuana in New York, Tyree was pulled over, police say for a broken taillight. A search of his car uncovered half a pound of marijuana, and Tyree was taken into custody. After he got out of jail and talked with Leilah, he knew he needed to make some major changes. He told her he wanted her to join him in New Jersey and promised things would get better.

Although Leilah's friends were skeptical about her rejoining Tyree, she had high hopes. "I was just following my heart at the time, and I didn't know if it was going to work out," says Leilah, who eventually married Tyree. "It was just a chance I was willing to take all over again."

Tyree had heard about a church Juanita Jordan attended. Jordan was Thelma Tyree's longtime friend, a woman David refers to as his aunt. Tyree decided to go, hoping the experience would make him feel better about himself and help him start to turn his life around.

He also was fined \$10,000 by coach Jim Fassel for being late to multiple meetings. Tyree decided to recoup that money by selling marijuana. He now could afford to smoke the best weed, so why not sell it for profit?



These are glorious days for Tyree, who has a strong Christian belief, a beautiful family and—oh, yeah—a diamond-encrusted Super Bowl ring.

As he sat in a folding chair during the church service on March 14, 2004, Tyree noticed one of the choir members performing in front of the congregation, a woman singing to God with a beaming smile on her face. He pondered his status as a young man with a promising NFL career ahead of him, knowing many men would trade their lives for his. He also realized he didn't have what this woman had. He had no joy in his life. No peace.

Suddenly, Tyree felt something stir inside him. He straightened up in his chair and tried to hold in his emotions. But he started crying, bawling "a brand-new baby cry" for 20 minutes. When he finally stopped sobbing, it felt like huge weights had been lifted off his shoulders.

"I had a sense of relief and joy and being able to rejoice, knowing that the burden no longer was mine. I didn't have to carry it, I didn't have to put on

The take on Tyree

A pro scout from another NFL team breaks down David Tyree, 28, who is entering his sixth season.

As a receiver: A decent route runner, not a great route runner. An intermediate receiver. Like a lot of guys, he doesn't have great speed. Works inside well. Can break press coverage because of his strength. Probably more of a No. 4 receiver than a No. 3. His special teams play is so strong, you'd probably lose that if he had to play more.

As a special teams player: Aggressive and smart. Understands lane responsibility and angles. Is always around the ball. Plays hungry.

Bottom line: His strength is his strength, like you saw in the Super Bowl. He's strong and aggressive and can push his way around. Has been nicked up a lot, which has led to some inconsistencies in his play.

an act anymore," he says. "I jumped and rejoiced around this place like I had been going to church for years. The spirit of God was so rich and high in here that I don't think the pastor got a chance to talk."

Later, Tyree accepted an invitation to walk to the front of the church, join a few others in prayer and make a public confession. He then made a declaration to accept Jesus as the Lord of his life.

"His change was so dramatic—it was immediate," Leilah says. "I began to see the manifestation take place right before my eyes. He stopped drinking, period. His priorities, like family, were important to him. Just his whole demeanor was different. He seemed mature. Then I knew I had the right one, baby."

Call it a religious transformation. The sinner had found salvation.

**THIS is how
David Tyree's life changed:**

with the most spectacular catch in Super Bowl history.

He was the most improbable candidate to make such a remarkable reception. Known more for his prowess as a special teams player—he was selected to the Pro Bowl as the NFC's special teams player after the 2005 season—Tyree rarely gets a chance to make a play on offense. He had only four receptions during the 2007 regular season and had just three catches to that point in the postseason—although the last one, a 5-yard touchdown early in the fourth quarter, had given the Giants a 10-7 lead over the Patriots. And he had been horrendous during practice on Friday.

"In our world, two drops is a bad day," Tyree says. "Three drops is like, 'Oh, my gosh, what the heck is going on?' I had about five. Part of me wanted to fall off the face of the earth. Every guy has one of those days; you just don't want it to be two days before the Super Bowl."

After practice, Tyree went up to Manning to reassure him, but the quarterback interrupted him before he could finish his sentence. "I know you'll be ready to go," Manning told Tyree. "Don't even worry about it."

Now, as Manning's pass headed toward Tyree, safety Rodney Harrison moved into position to defend it. Tyree leaped, caught the ball and held it

against the side of his helmet with the fingertips of his right hand until he could secure it with his left hand as he tumbled to the ground. He then held the ball up high so the officials could see he had control.

"I remember feeling it come into my hands. I felt like I had good position," says Tyree, who had watched the play dozens of times on highlight films since the Super Bowl but recently watched it for the first time

on coaches tape—getting both vertical and horizontal views—in a meeting room at Giants Stadium. “I didn’t realize it was on my helmet at the time, so I thought maybe it was (Harrison’s) hand. At that point, it was: ‘This is my rock.’”

So how high did he jump? Tyree laughed.

“I think I jumped higher than I naturally could,” he says. “I probably have the worst vertical on the team. My vertical was so bad, they gave me another chance to do it at my pro day. I had a 31; that’s horrible for a receiver. An average vertical jump for a receiver is like 34 or 35 (inches).”

Tyree’s 32-yard catch gave the Giants a first down with 59 seconds left. Four plays later, Manning and Burress hooked up on a 13-yard scoring pass that lifted the Giants to a 17-14 victory and one of the most stunning upsets in NFL history.

Thinking he had simply won a jump ball, Tyree didn’t exactly wax poetic to reporters about his big catch after the game. It was only after he had returned to the team hotel, dropped his bags in his room and gone down to the party in the ballroom that he saw a replay and realized the unusual nature of the play. *Oh, so that’s what the fuss was about*, he thought.

“I felt like this play was an honest-to-God miracle from start to finish,” Tyree says. “Me being a spiritual man and a believer in the Lord, it was my firm conviction that it was God showing Himself strong in my life. He can take a fourth-string wide receiver who no one knows and everybody deems as just a special teams player and basically shock the world.”

**THIS is
David Tyree's life today:**

**celebrity, family man,
striving football player.**

Since the Super Bowl, Tyree has had more than his 15 minutes of fame. In the week after the game, he flew to Los Angeles, where he appeared on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* He often is noticed now when he goes out in public. When he and Leilah went to Uno Chicago Grill—they love the brownie bowl—the waitress recognized him. As they were leaving, several patrons asked for autographs or to get their pictures taken with Tyree.

He is collaborating with Kimberly Daniels, a

‘Oh, so that’s what the fuss was about.’

—Tyree’s thoughts after seeing a replay of his catch at a Super Bowl postgame party



minister and author in Jacksonville, Fla., whom Tyree calls “my spiritual mother,” on a book due out in September. Titled *More Than Just The Catch*, it will be part autobiography, part inspirational, part sports book. Rodney Harrison wrote one of the forewords.

And David and Leilah are continuing their work with “Next in Line,” their grass-roots ministry project that targets teens. This spring, Tyree spoke at a youth ministry in Newark, N.J. When he came out, he discovered that someone had smashed in the driver’s-side window in Leilah’s Nissan Quest van and stolen the navigation system. Tyree remembers thinking: “I must have done something right because the devil’s mad.”

On a recent afternoon, Tyree sits at a dining

room table in his two-story home on a quiet cul-de-sac in Wayne, N.J., opening mail, chatting on his cell phone and helping 6-year-old Teyon with his homework. The Tyrees also have 3-year-old Josiah and twin daughters Hannah and Sophia, who were born in February.

Leilah is asked how the Super Bowl catch has affected David. “He hasn’t really changed—just his schedule,” she says, laughing. “He’s definitely my funny, humorous husband. That’s what I love most about him. He’s an awesome daddy. I didn’t have a father like that in my life. But I look at him and think if I could pick a dad for my kids, or for me, it would have been him.”

Although Tyree didn’t live with his own father growing up, Jesse Tyree Jr. was an important figure in his son’s life who continues to play integral roles as a father—especially since Thelma died last December—and a grandpa to Tyree’s children. The influence of his father helped shape Tyree’s desire to have a family of his own. “One thing I want people to know,” says Tyree, “is that my father is special to me. He’s a great man, and I look up to him.”

The Catch won’t change Tyree’s status with the Giants. In fact, recent stories have speculated that he may be hard-pressed to keep his roster spot. He already is behind Burress, Toomer and Smith in the wide receiver pecking order, and the Giants have a long line of receivers, including third-round pick Mario Manningham of Michigan. That logjam, coupled with the fact he has been unable to participate in OTAs because he is recovering from offseason arthroscopic knee surgery, could mean Tyree will have to

fight harder than ever in training camp.

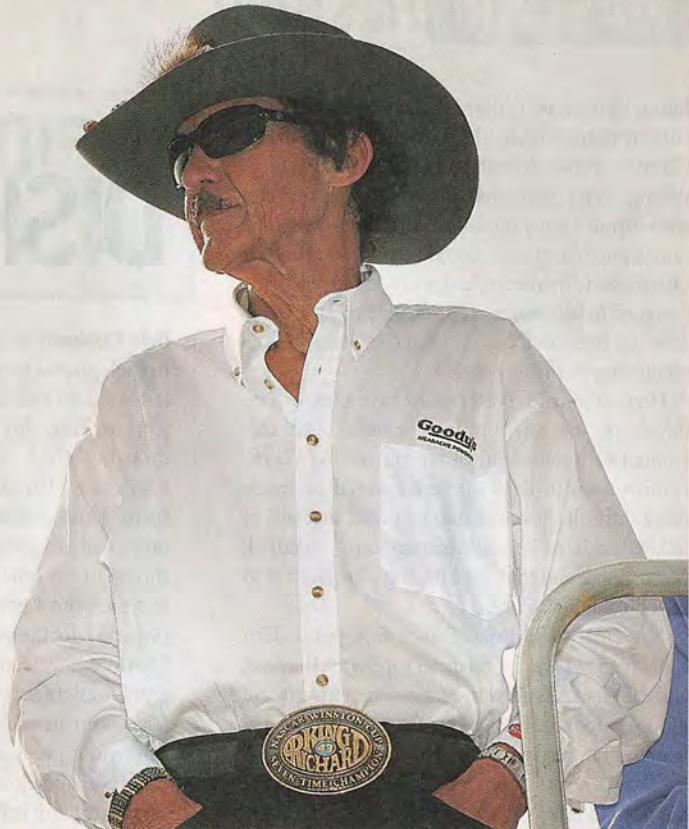
“We’ve got a very competitive group. There’s a lot of talent there,” says Giants wide receivers coach Mike Sullivan. “He will be competing with everybody else to put themselves in position to get on the field.

“You can’t discount the two qualities he brings to the table—toughness and dependability. His record of stepping up and making plays when called upon is a great feather in his cap. . . . I just think the world of David Tyree. He’s certainly been a great role model for all of our players and coaches from the standpoint of how he’s turned his life around.”

Don’t count out Tyree. With divine intervention on his side, he already has made two quantum leaps.

Failure to keep pace in NASCAR's corporate world has forced Petty Enterprises to sell a majority interest in the team. Results won't come overnight.

Catching up is hard to do



By Kenny Bruce

Richard Petty, now 70 and still the winningest driver in the sport's history after retiring more than a decade ago, made a career out of going fast around race-tracks.

Fast enough to win a Sprint series-record 200 races. Fast enough to win seven Cup championships. Fast enough to make his name synonymous with stock car racing.

But what he didn't do, and what he hasn't done

since retirement, is react as quickly or successfully off the track. He didn't react to the changing face of the sport as it evolved from a tightly knit group of family-owned organizations to one that now features multicar race teams run by CEOs and boards of directors for owners who care more about profit margins than margins of victory.

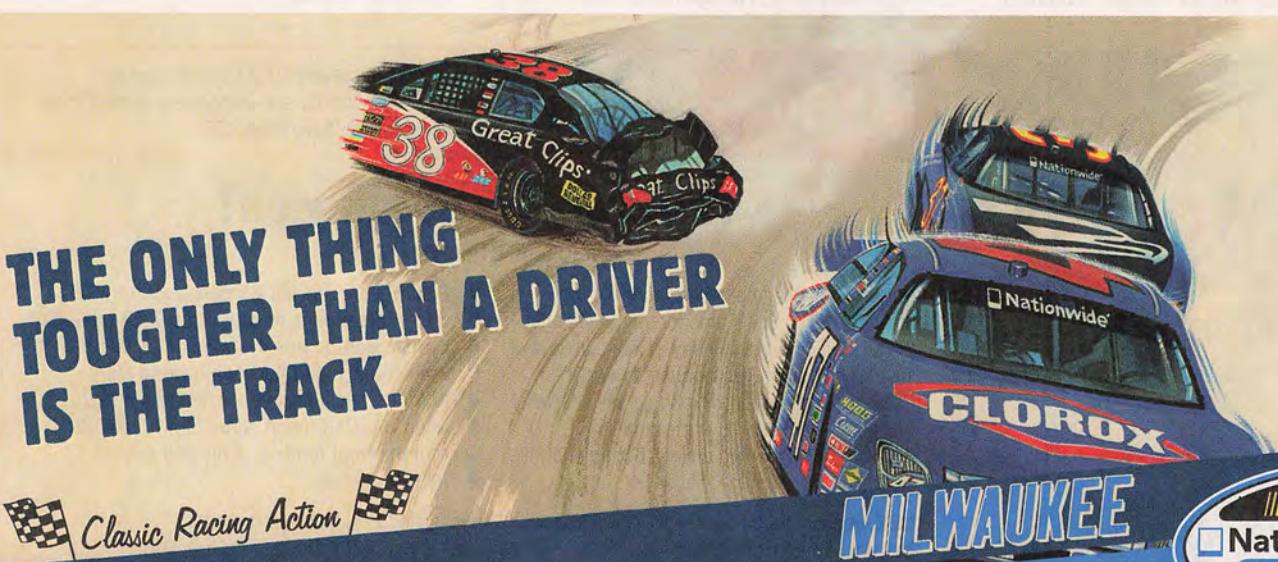
In large part, that's why Petty Enterprises, the oldest operation in NASCAR, has fallen behind the times. It's also why such successful organizations as Hendrick Motorsports, Roush Fenway Racing and Joe Gibbs Racing—organizations that

Petty will always be King, but life in the corporate fast lane has been a drag.

employ hundreds of people—have left Petty Enterprises in the dust.

Fifty years of prosperity has been dulled by nearly a decade of failure. And there are no quick fixes in NASCAR. Petty Enterprises' latest move—selling a majority interest in the team to Boston Ventures—won't guarantee a return to former glory.

Taking on investors isn't the wave of NASCAR's



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future; it's the wave of the here and now. At least four current teams—Richard Childress Racing, Roush, Gillett Evernham Motorsports and Michael Waltrip Racing—have partnered up, to varying degrees, with private equity groups or individuals. In addition to providing much-needed capital, such unions often include marketing and sponsorship platforms designed to help teams compete for exposure while allowing them to focus on what they know best—competing on the racetrack.

How successful those unions have been can be difficult to measure. But many owners agree that without such outside involvement, fielding a competitive team in the Cup Series would be much more difficult. It should also be noted that two of today's most successful organizations—Hendrick Motorsports and Joe Gibbs Racing—haven't had to seek outside assistance.

NASCAR CEO Brian France says teams don't have to go outside for financial support. "They can and they have. It's attractive for different investment groups to look at. The jury is still out as to the actual benefits they receive."

"But there are a number of teams that don't feel the need to bring on any private equity, if you will, or other expertise. So it's not an either/or."

None of the current investors had a prior background in NASCAR, and, in that regard, Boston Ventures is no different. The 25-year-old company's portfolio has included a variety of entertainment, media and communications properties, such as Motown Record Company, Billboard Magazine Group and Six Flags theme parks.

"We're investing and partnering with Richard and his family and their management team to grow their business," says Andrew Davis, managing director for Boston Ventures. "It's the next chapter in the Petty legacy, and we're going to do everything we can to be good partners, to make sure that that legacy continues. It's not like Boston Ventures is

INSIDE DISH

Dale Earnhardt Jr. appeared to apologize for how he won last Sunday's race at Michigan to snap his 76-race drought. "My fans are happy, and I'm happy for them," Earnhardt said. "The other half are going to tear this apart on how we won this race, but I got the trophy and I got the points and I got to see my team and my family tonight happy as they have been in a long time. This win is pretty special to me." No apologies necessary. Earnhardt isn't the first to win on a fuel mileage gamble, and he won't be the last. The victory, the 18th of his Cup career,



Earnhardt's winless streak ran out of gas, but his desire to celebrate didn't.

ride. Of course, that was before Logano won his first race in his third start.

moves him into a tie with **Geoffrey Bodine, Neil Bonnett** and **Harry Gant** in 36th place on the career wins list. > After **Joey Logano**, at 18 years, 21 days, became the youngest winner in Nationwide Series history last Saturday at Kentucky, team owner **Joe Gibbs** said, "We would like to get him in some Cup stuff toward the end of the year. Now whether we're going to be able to do it or not ... we want to make sure he's in good stuff and (that we do it) the right way." That marked a shift in plans from last month at Charlotte, when team president **J.D. Gibbs** said Joe Gibbs Racing would not rush Logano into a Cup

in, and that's where Boston Ventures comes in.

"I just look at it as growth. It's just like us not going to North Wilkesboro (Speedway) anymore or not going to (North Carolina Speedway). This is progress as far as I'm concerned."

"For us to get bigger and better, we can't continue to do the same thing we've been doing." **SN**

Kenny Bruce is assistant managing editor for NASCAR Scene. Read more from Bruce at scenedaily.com.

Pit Box

NASCAR experts Roger Kuznia and Reid Spencer size up the upcoming race—and each other's analysis—every week in the Pit Box. This week: Toyota/Save Mart 350

Who will win at Infineon?

4:30 p.m. ET Sunday, TNT

Roger: Everything has gone wrong for Tony Stewart lately, but it's time for that to change. His luck will improve Sunday at Infineon, one of 11 tracks Stewart has conquered more than once. He'll be pushed by road course specialist Boris Said (ranked fifth in driver rating at Infineon) and other top drivers, but no one will stop him from climbing the fence.

Reid: I'll go with Jeff Gordon, another veteran who has a prolific record at the 1.99-mile road course. Gordon has five wins in 15 starts in wine country, and he won't have to start from the back of the pack, as he did in 2007 when NASCAR found some funny business with the front fenders of his and Jimmie Johnson's cars.

Last week: Reid picked Greg Biffle (20th) and Roger picked Carl Edwards (seventh), but Dale Earnhardt Jr. ended his 76-race winless streak with a victory in the LifeLock 400.



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Help is on the way

There might not be an Ovechkin or a Crosby available, but this year's draft has a Stamkos and some less-glitz but good prizes

By Chuck Gormley

There was a time when Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux provided the standards by which every top prospect was measured. Now the barometers of greatness are Alex Ovechkin, Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin. Superstar-in-waiting Steven Stamkos has drawn comparisons to all three.

"Those guys are elite players, and he might be a fraction below them," says Jake Goertzen, chief scout for a Lightning team that is expected to make Stamkos the first pick of the Friday-Saturday draft in Ottawa. "He is the complete package."

Lightning general manager Jay Feaster has said he will entertain offers for the top pick, but Goertzen contends Stamkos is almost untouchable. "If somebody came and blew our doors down I guess we'd have to listen," he says. "Do I see it happening? No, I don't think so."

Stamkos believes his skills are more comparable to Ovechkin's than Crosby's or Malkin's. "I like (Ovechkin's) style of play," says Stamkos, who recorded 58 goals and 47 assists in 61 games for the Sarnia Sting of the Ontario Hockey League last season. "Like me, he's not afraid to rough it up out there."

Projected top 10

1 Steven Stamkos, C (5-11, 176, Sarnia, OHL). The fastest player in the draft can set up goals as well as score them. Many scouts believe he is several steps ahead of the rest of the class and will become an impact player next season.

2 Zach Bogosian, D (6-2, 197, Peterborough, OHL). Coached by Hall of Fame defenseman Raymond Bourque while he was in high school, Bogosian is an exceptional skater who will match up well against top forwards while still providing offense from the blue line.

3 Drew Doughty, D (6-0, 219, Guelph, OHL). An offensive defenseman with a wicked slap shot from the point, Doughty could develop into an explosive power play quarterback. He was named top defenseman in the 2008 World Junior Championships, joining an elite group that includes current NHL stars Marc Staal, Dion Phaneuf and Bryan McCabe.

4 Luke Schenn, D (6-2, 216, Kelowna, WHL). This hard-nosed, hard-hitting defenseman draws comparisons to Ed Jovanovski and Adam Foote. One issue: Schenn sometimes abandons his defensive position to make a big hit.

5 Tyler Myers, D (6-7, 204, Kelowna, WHL). The tallest player in the draft has been compared to two-way Bruins defenseman Zdeno Chara. Myers makes good use of his long reach in the defensive zone and is an excellent skater for his size.

6 Nikita Filatov, LW (6-0, 172, CSKA Moscow, Russian Junior League). Although he never will be a power forward in the NHL, Filatov can give a hit as well as take one and has the offensive skill to be a top-line winger. Only nine Russians were taken in last year's draft, but Filatov's potential will make him a top 10 selection.

7 Alex Pietrangelo, D (6-3, 206, Niagara, OHL). Scouts say at 18, he is further along than Chris Pronger was at this age. Pietrangelo has the potential to move into the top five.

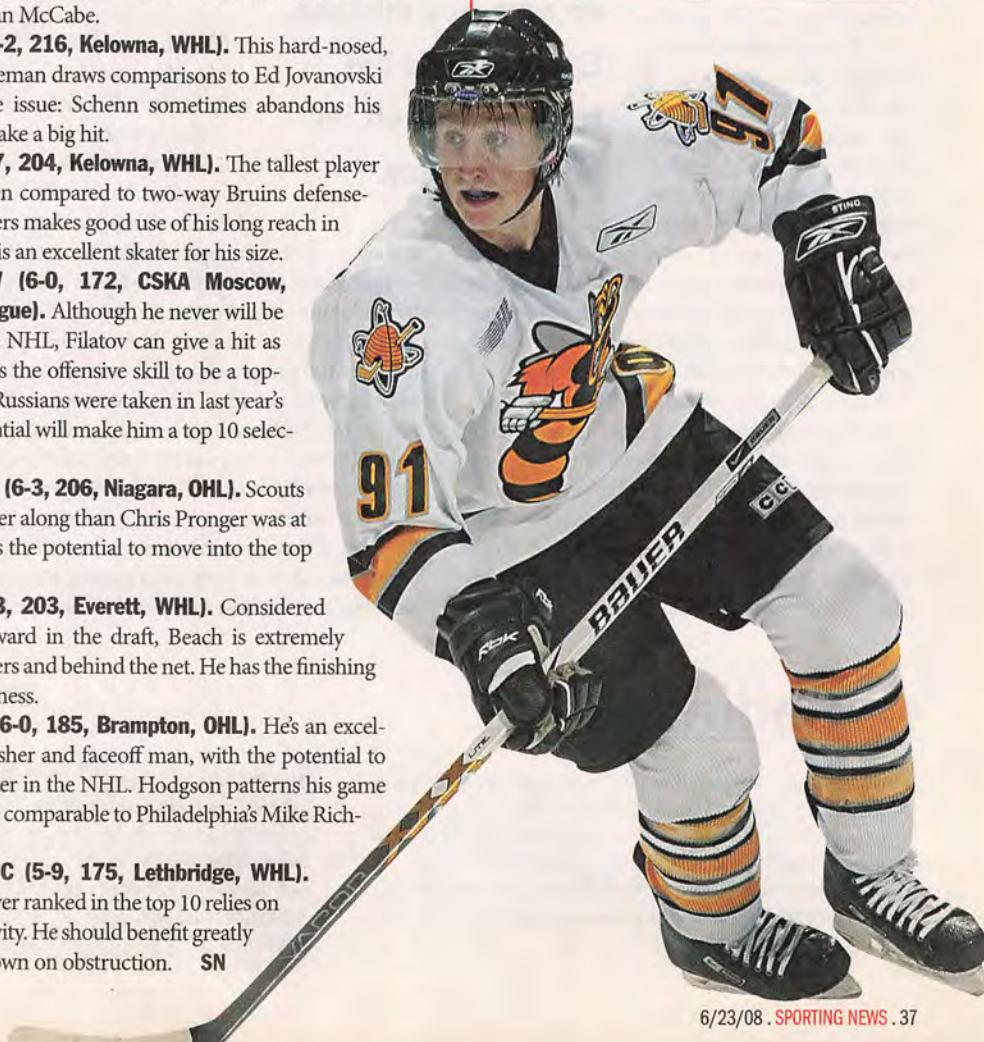
8 Kyle Beach, C (6-3, 203, Everett, WHL). Considered the top power forward in the draft, Beach is extremely competitive in the corners and behind the net. He has the finishing skills to match his grittiness.

9 Cody Hodgson, C (6-0, 185, Brampton, OHL). He's an excellent playmaker, finisher and faceoff man, with the potential to be a No. 1 or No. 2 center in the NHL. Hodgson patterns his game after Crosby but is more comparable to Philadelphia's Mike Richards.

10 Zach Boychuk, C (5-9, 175, Lethbridge, WHL). The smallest player ranked in the top 10 relies on speed, vision and creativity. He should benefit greatly from the NHL's crackdown on obstruction. **SN**

First-round picks

1. Lightning
2. Kings
3. Thrashers
4. Blues
5. Islanders
6. Blue Jackets
7. Maple Leafs
8. Coyotes
9. Predators (from Panthers)
10. Canucks
11. Blackhawks
12. Ducks (from Oilers)
13. Sabres
14. Hurricanes
15. Predators
16. Bruins
17. Flames
18. Senators
19. Blue Jackets (from Avalanche)
20. Rangers
21. Devils
22. Oilers (from Ducks)
23. Capitals
24. Wild
25. Canadiens
26. Sabres (from Sharks)
27. Flyers
28. Kings (from Stars)
29. Thrashers (from Penguins)
30. Red Wings



There are better ways to get disputed home run calls right.

MLB is overreacting on instant replay

By Sean Deveney

sdeveney@sportingnews.com

Instant replay has gained momentum the point of inevitability in Major League Baseball. To heck, the league is saying, with purists, curmudgeons and that old fogey of a commissioner, Bud Selig. MLB wants replay implemented before the postseason and wants to give it some time before October rolls around to make sure all systems are operational. Thus it was revealed last week that we could be seeing replay—limited to “boundary calls”—by August 1.

The cases to be made for and against replay are straightforward. If you’re against it, you’re basically worried about ruining the pace of a game and about the possibility of replay eventually being expanded to include fair/foul, safe/out and even ball/strike calls. If you’re pro-replay, you just want to see the umps get home run calls right in a noninvasive way. Each argument has its merits, but, clearly, getting the call right has won out and rule changes are nigh. It’s hard to argue against using all available methods to get things right.

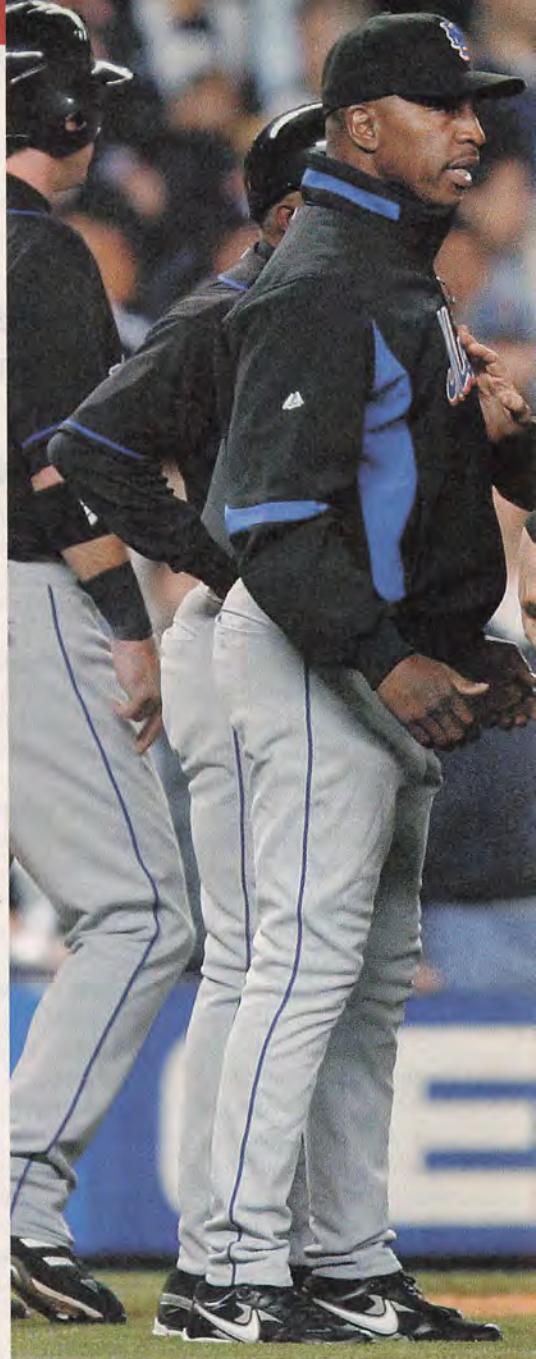
But it’s also hard to argue that MLB isn’t giving in to public pressure based on an unfortunate series of missed calls, all crammed into a short window. Momentum for replay was glacial when the season started, but that changed in the course of four days in May. The Mets’ Carlos Delgado was robbed of a home run by a bad call at Yankee Stadium on May 18, and, the next day in Houston, a hit by the

Cubs’ Geovany Soto was ruled in play when it had actually left the park (Soto wound up with an inside-the-park homer). Two days after that, a home run by the Yankees’ Alex Rodriguez was ruled a double, and crew chief Tim Welke, asked if he’d seen a replay, said, “We just did, and we made a mistake.”

An admitted mistake. Egads. That’s the reason we’re on the brink of replay. Three missed calls in four days, and ever since, the push for replay has been on. Something in the range of 99 percent of home runs are undisputed, but because three examples of that small disputable percentage popped up one after the other, we’re going to wind up with a rush to replay. MLB seems spooked by the idea that, with this kind of momentum behind replay, there could be a blown call that tarnishes the playoffs.

“That bothers me,” says one N.L. executive. “This is caving to pressure. It’s not being done because we’re sure it’s the best and right way to do things. It’s being done for P.R.”

That should bother even proponents of replay—the end result might be positive, but the way we’ve gotten there is troublesome. The executive points out that MLB isn’t giving proper consideration to all answers to the problem. Here’s one: more umpires, one in left field and one in right. The Japanese leagues have done this, and MLB does it in the postseason—which hasn’t necessarily stopped blown calls. But playoff umps are usually stationed down the lines. If they were stationed at the wall, in the corner, with the sole purpose of making home run calls, mistakes on those calls would be nearly elimi-



nated without replay.

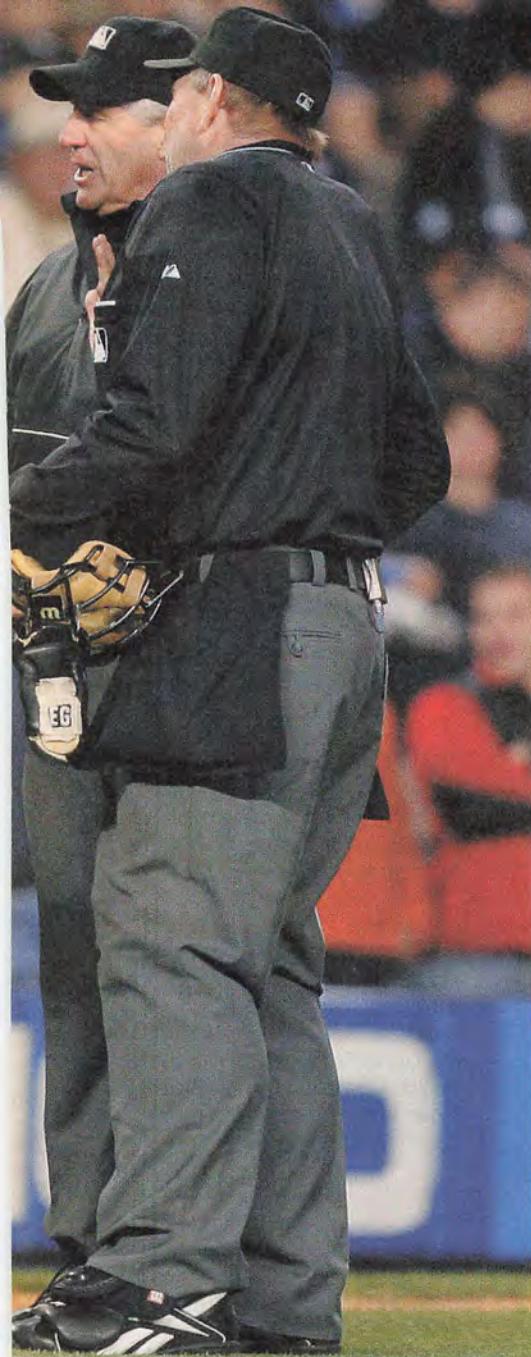
The cost of paying the umpires’ salaries and expenses would be a problem. But if baseball could handle the outlay, everyone would be happy. The umpires would get more jobs. MLB would avoid a further P.R. fracas. Purists would rejoice. And, most

speedreads

Nice seasons for Jason Bay and Xavier Nady seem to make the Pirates a perfect trading partner for teams in need of outfield help. But the team is still lingering near .500, and management is looking at 82-82 as a goal for the year. Pirates fans haven’t seen a nonlosing season since 1993, so even though it’s probably unwise not to make some deals, I say go for it.

The Rangers had themselves a good old-fashioned tarp slide during a delay at rain-soaked Shea Stadium last week. You just don’t see tarp slides nearly enough anymore.

Jay Gibbons’ blaming his inclusion in the Mitchell Report for teams’ failure to sign him is like blaming a speeding ticket for your inability to get into Harvard. Gibbons can’t stay healthy, is coming off shoulder surgery, has a career OBP of .314 and hit .230 last year. That’s why he went unsigned, just like the reason you didn’t get into Harvard was that C-plus average.



Instant replay could eliminate blown home run calls, but that doesn't mean it's the best way to address the situation.

important, the home run calls would be right.

It's worth a shot. Implementing replay is crossing Rubicon—there's no going back. In every sport, once replay settles in, it stays and even expands its presence. That might not wind up being a bad thing for baseball. But instant replay must not be made reality as a knee-jerk reaction to a bad series of games, and it must not be implemented until alternate solutions have been tried.

SN

 Is your favorite team on the move? Check Sean Devaney's power poll every week at sportingnews.com.

What do you do with a top prospect who's having a bad time of it in Class AAA? Promote him, of course. That's what the Braves did last week with OF **Brandon Jones**, who was one of the organization's top outfielders after hitting .295 with 19 homers and 100

RBIs in the top two levels of the minors last year. But, this year, Jones—a lefthander known for his quick and powerful stroke—was off to a slow start, hitting .265 with just two home runs. The Braves moved him up to the big league club, a move that raised some eyebrows. Jones started with five hits in his first 10 at-bats. Still, when a team inexplicably promotes a struggling minor leaguer, it's because trading him is a possibility. > Another Class AAA phenom popped up in the big leagues last weekend, too—but in this case, San Diego OF **Chase Headley** had clearly earned the promotion, batting over .300 with 13 home runs in his first 65 games for Portland. > Mets manager **Willie Randolph** is all but certain to lose his job, but, says one scout, "That roster is a mess. They're old, there's not enough depth, and the clubhouse is broken. Where are they going to find a manager to replace Willie who can fix all of that?" > So much for the feel-good free-agent story of Twins RHP **Livan Hernandez**. He was 6-2 with a 3.88 ERA in his first nine starts but posted an 11.10 ERA and an 0-2 record over his next five outings. Hernández typically throws in the 80s, keeping hitters off-balance with a variety of screwy fastballs down in the zone. But he's gotten almost as many fly-ball outs (35) as ground-ball outs (36) in those five starts. Manager **Ron Gardenhire** said after Hernández's last start: "Everything's waist-up, and he can't pitch like that. He's not an overpowering guy." > Not only did LHP **Barry**

Zito reach double-digit losses last week, but he figures to have five more starts before the All-Star break. Though he has pitched better lately, without an extended stint on the disabled list or—perish the thought—a winning streak, Zito is on the path to

20 losses. > Texas DH **Milton Bradley**, in the midst of his best season, said that when he went to the press box after hearing negative comments from Royals broadcaster **Ryan Lefebvre**, he was merely trying to introduce himself. The



When Jones got a call-up, it was a sign he could be traded.

idea, he said, was that Lefebvre and broadcast partner **Frank White** could see he was not nearly as bad a guy as his reputation would suggest. That might sound farfetched, but Bradley has been on a one-man image-changing campaign all year. Says Bradley, "It's amazing when you actually meet somebody how different they become."

THE CLOSER



Todd Jones

Crafty managers find a way to light a fire

Much ado about nothing? Every year, managers rant at their teams. They are looking for a spark anywhere they can find one. Ozzie Guillen gets credit for a seven-game winning streak, but how much did he really have to do with it? John McLaren tears into his team during a postgame news conference. His team doesn't win seven straight, but it plays better. Does that mean he gets the same spark?

What's a manager trying to convey with a rant? First of all, with all the media coverage, managers know exactly what they're doing when it comes to blowups in front of reporters. You don't see too many spontaneous tantrums like Hal McRae had in Kansas City in the '90s—although my buddy Sean Devaney, for one, contends that the unrehearsed variety is the only way to go (*see page 22*).

Teams get a 10-minute cooling-off period after games before the media is allowed in. I've seen skippers throw bats and helmets and cuss us up one side and down the other, then they're calm as they can be during a news conference.

But managers don't have the luxury of putting distance between themselves and the media the way players do. Every day they have to answer the numbing, often-repetitive questions. If skippers don't pay

attention, they can get put in a bad place by the media. For example, players don't want to talk about their teammates not doing too well, so the media will go to the manager. A skipper will say, "You guys have the same numbers. You know what's going on. You write it, but I'm not going to help you bury one of my players!"

If the skipper knows what he's doing, any tirade in front of the media already has been discussed in a closed-door meeting with his team. You don't want to use the media to communicate to your players. Now he might use the media to reinforce a point he already has made. Some players respond only when they are called out publicly.

I've heard of managers who will call a team meeting just so one player will get his point. I've been in meetings when a manager gets right in a player's face and challenges him to a fight or just to step it up and play better. Charlie Manuel is known for saying, "If you're hot, stay hot! If you're not hot, get hot!"

What fans need to realize is that most managers' bursts really are premeditated. The important thing is finding a way to get your message across. If being perceived as wacky is what it takes, a manager will do it.



Guillen let his team have it a few weeks ago, but he was all smiles when the wins started rolling in.

The week ahead

June 20-22

The Battle of Chicago

Worlds collide at Wrigley

Field, where the contending White Sox face the contending Cubs. The only missing element is volatile Carlos Zambrano, who is not scheduled to pitch for the Cubs. Their rotation is set up for Jason Marquis, Ted Lilly and Ryan Dempster against John Danks, Jose Contreras and Javier Vazquez. Advantage: White Sox.

Identity switch

The interleague mix presents the odd contrast of the Angels, an American League team that plays with National League-like aggressiveness on offense, against the Phillies, an N.L. club that takes the A.L.'s wait-for-a-3-run-homer approach. The Angels' style travels well—the A.L. West leaders are on course for their fourth winning road record in five seasons—and this series is in Philadelphia.

Any regrets?

When his Houston plays at Tampa Bay, Astros owner Drayton McLane may ask himself, "What did I do to make Gerry Hunsicker leave town?" Hunsicker, who quit as Astros general manager after the 2004 season, is having a significant impact with the surprising Rays as a front office voice of wisdom.

June 23-25

D-backs tempt fate

Amid their second three-city trip in June, the Diamondbacks visit Fenway Park. Arizona ace Brandon Webb is not scheduled to start in this series (nor is Boston's No. 1, Josh Beckett), but there will be plenty of pitching intrigue. In a rare move, the D-backs will use two lefthanders—Doug Davis and Randy Johnson—at Fenway. Johnson is 8-2 in the shadow of the Green Monster despite a 5.01 ERA; Davis is 1-1 with a 3.38 ERA.

June 24-26

Steel City blues

The Yankees visit Pittsburgh for the first time since the 1960 World Series. Facing the Yanks in interleague play has not gone well for the Pirates, who are 0-6 against New York and have been outscored, 49-19. Jorge Posada has hit .467 against Pittsburgh. —Gerry Fraley

Stars maligned

In the suddenly hot N.L. Central, the Cubs and Cardinals are thriving. But now each team faces an injury to its best hitter. By Ryan Fagan

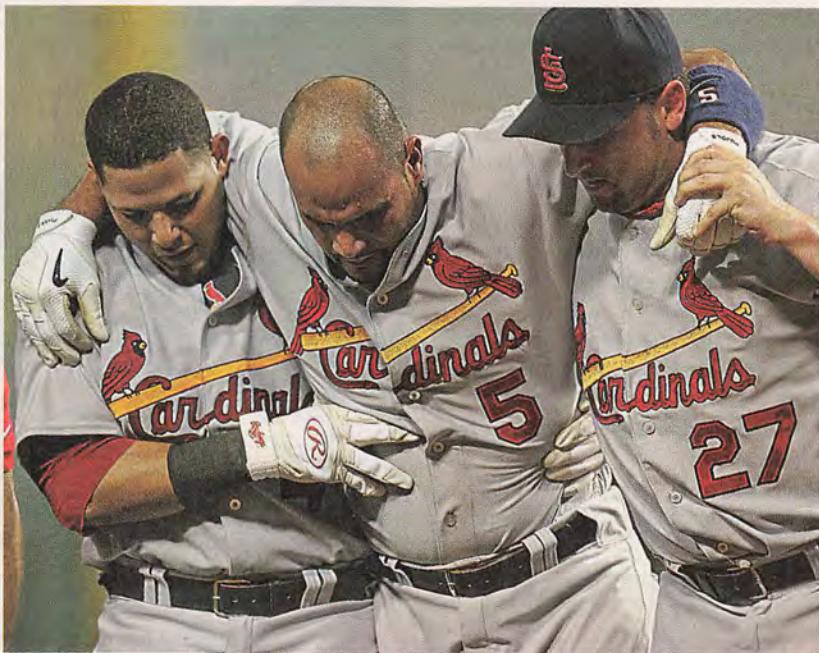
This sure has been an odd season in middle America.

The Centrals are all mixed up. The A.L. Central—which has produced World Series teams in two of the past three seasons—has one club on the sunny side of .500. The N.L. Central—which has been won with 83 and 85 wins the past two seasons—has not only the best record in baseball (the Cubs) but also the best second-place record in the game (the Cardinals).

And the surprising season took another twist in two painful days last week. First, Cardinals slugger Albert Pujols crumpled to the ground in Cincinnati with a strained left calf. The next day, Cubs slugger Alfonso Soriano dug in against Atlanta's Jeff Bennett and was smacked on the left hand by a bone-breaking fastball.

Just that quickly, both N.L. Central front-runners lost their best hitters. Pujols, who was batting .347 with 16 homers and 42 RBIs, will miss at least three weeks. Soriano, who was hitting .283 with 15 homers and 40 RBIs, will miss at least six weeks. "Crazy, isn't it?" says Cardinals outfielder Ryan Ludwick. "Both of them. It's very unfortunate, but that's baseball. You've got to find a way to get around that."

For the Cardinals, the burden falls on the shoulders of guys such as Ludwick, who, at 29, is in the midst of a breakthrough season that could earn him a spot on an All-Star roster. He had settled



Pujols and Soriano (below) won't be carrying their teams anytime soon.



Big names, big pain

This has been an injury-marred season for some of baseball's top players.

Tom Glavine. The durable one finally broke his disabled list seal—twice. The most recent cause, a sore elbow, likely will be an issue until he hangs 'em up.

Matt Holliday. His strained hamstring has typified the Rockies' disappointing season. They were 11 games under .500 when he hit the D.L. and 15 under by the time he returned.

Pedro Martinez. If Martinez, who missed two months with a strained hamstring, could return to his days of dominance, maybe the Mets wouldn't be such a mess. Maybe.

David Ortiz. The Red Sox are 9-4 since Big Papi's injured wrist took him out of the lineup. It helps that J.D. Drew has hit .444 with six homers and 15 RBIs in those 13 games.

Alex Rodriguez. The Yankees were 6-11 while A-Rod, who is putting together another stellar season, was sidelined with a strained quad.

nicely into the cleanup spot in the lineup, right behind Pujols. Now, though, Ludwick is batting in the all-important No. 3 spot. Chris Duncan, whose struggles this season got him demoted to Class AAA Memphis, was recalled to take Pujols' spot at first base.

For the Cardinals, who went 2-2 in the first four games after Pujols' injury, it's just another obstacle to overcome. A few days before Pujols was hurt, ace Adam Wainwright had gone on the disabled list with a sprained finger on his pitching hand. Wainwright is the third Cardinals pitcher to be placed on the D.L. since the end of April. "Mentally, I feel this team is strong because we went through so much last year," Ludwick says. "I think people tend to forget that around September 1 last year, we were right there within a game of first place."

Up in Chicago, Soriano's injury will allow manager Lou Piniella to play around with his lineup, which is deep and powerful. For all of Soriano's positive attributes, he's not an ideal leadoff hitter, though he insists on batting first. In the first three games after the wayward fastball, Piniella used three different players—Eric Patterson, Ryan Theriot and Reed Johnson—in the leadoff spot.

In a twist capable of further fueling the Cubs-Cards rivalry, Soriano's injury creates more playing time for former Cardinals outfielder Jim Edmonds, who is hitting .361 with 10 RBIs in June. "We just have to keep it going and try not to dwell on it too much," Edmonds told the *Chicago Sun-Times*. "In order to win the division and get to the playoffs, you have to overcome adversity, and there's always something every year. You look back in the history of the game, and not too many teams can go six months without something happening."

SN

SCOUTS VIEWS

Observations and opinions from major league scouts

The road to .400 is steep, even for Jones

White-hot Chipper Jones could become the first player to begin July with a .400 average since Larry Walker did it with Colorado in 1997. And if he were to maintain that pace for another three months, Jones would become the first player since Hall of Famer Ted Williams in 1941 to hit .400 for a full season.

But a National League scout who holds Jones in high esteem thinks it's unrealistic to expect him—or anyone—to join the exclusive .400 club.

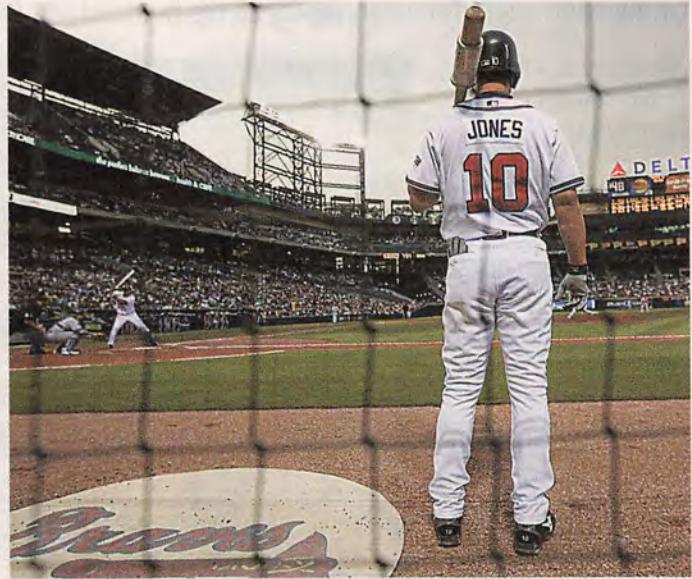
"Chipper has always been a good hitter, and he's getting better later in his career," the scout says. "But .400? No way. That's ridiculous."

As a switch hitter, Jones must keep two disparate swings in rhythm, with one side or the other constantly needing repair work. Most of Jones' problems develop with his natural righthanded swing. He last hit at least .300 against lefthanders in 2003.

There also is the matter of pitch selection. The scout says that to have a shot at .400, a hitter must be willing to take about 150 walks. Jones is not that type of hitter.

That said, the scout would not be shocked to see Jones continue his .400 rampage into August or even September.

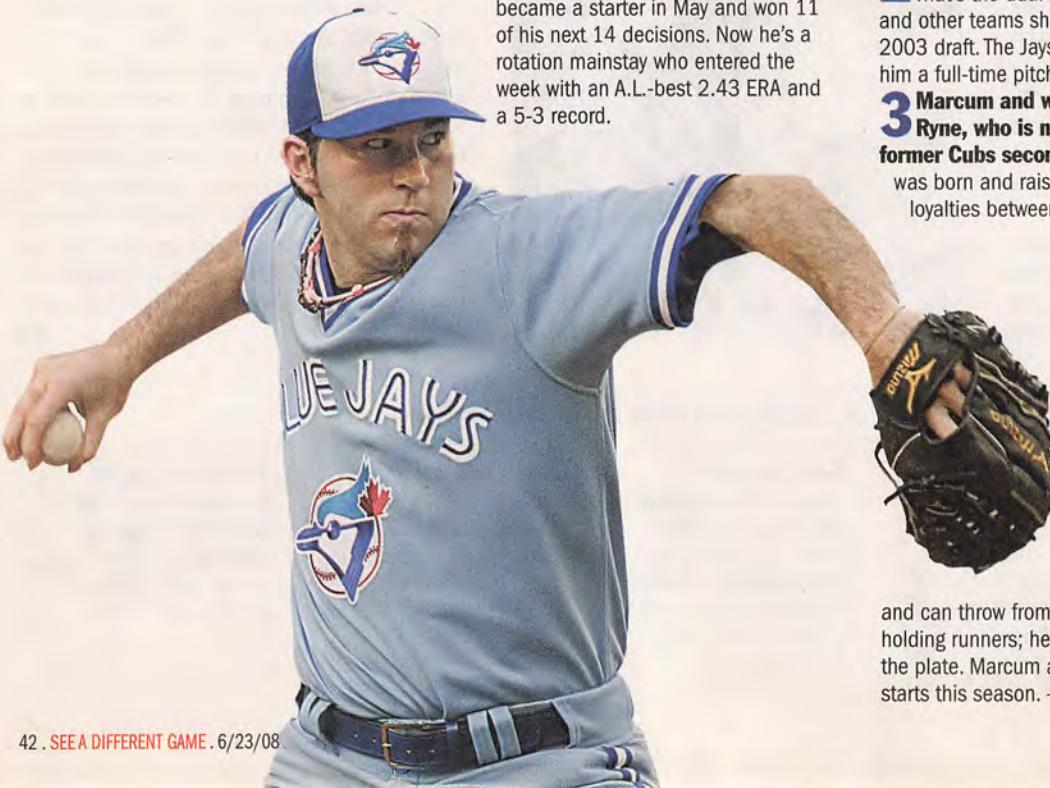
"He knows what he's looking for every at-bat, and he doesn't miss it when he gets it," the scout says. "And he's one tough hombre. The pressure won't bother him."



Jones just keeps getting better—but not .400 better.

5 things you need to know about ... Blue Jays RHP Shaun Marcum

After beginning the 2007 season in the Blue Jays' bullpen, Marcum became a starter in May and won 11 of his next 14 decisions. Now he's a rotation mainstay who entered the week with an A.L.-best 2.43 ERA and a 5-3 record.



1 Marcum has the best changeup on the staff, and it's the best pitch in his arsenal. When he was young, his parents and coaches wouldn't let him throw a curveball, so he worked on his change. It's probably the biggest reason he's now a big league pitcher.

2 Marcum grew up as a shortstop who also could pitch. That's the dual role he played in college at Missouri State, and other teams showed interest in him as a shortstop in the 2003 draft. The Jays grabbed him in the third round and made him a full-time pitcher.

3 Marcum and wife Stephanie have a 20-month-old son, Ryne, who is named after Marcum's favorite player—former Cubs second baseman Ryne Sandberg. Although he was born and raised in Kansas City, Marcum split his baseball loyalties between the Royals and Cubs.

4 About an hour and a half before a start, Marcum preps by listening to a tape of 16 songs he put together at the start of the year. He hears the same 16 songs before every start and, like his selection of pitches, it's a mixed bag. He has some old-school stuff, Metallica and AC/DC. Even when he goes through a rough spell, he sticks to his original 16 selections.

5 Thanks largely to his days as a shortstop, Marcum is an excellent fielder. He not only has good hands, but he is quick to pounce on bunts and can throw from a number of angles. He also excels at holding runners; he uses a slide step and is extremely quick to the plate. Marcum allowed just one stolen base in his first eight starts this season. —The Sports Xchange



Dunn may not have to leave Ohio if the Reds decide to trade him as the deadline approaches.

(RUMOR OF THE WEEK)

Dunn's big bat isn't long for Cincinnati—or the N.L.

Thanks to a quirk in the contract of Reds outfielder Adam Dunn, last Sunday was an important day for the baseball rumor mill. On that day, Dunn's no-trade clause became a limited clause that allowed him to submit a list of 10 teams to which he would agree to be traded. That change will pave the way for the Reds to move Dunn before the trading deadline.

A couple of things have led the Reds to this point. First was replacing Wayne Krivsky with new general manager Walt Jocketty, a friend of owner Bob Castellini's. Jocketty has more job security than Krivsky did and can afford to take a long-term view—and the belief is that Jocketty favors dumping veterans and rebuilding around the team's young core. With that in mind, deals for Ken Griffey have been considered, but at age 38 and with free agency possibly looming, Griffey is not drawing much interest.

Which leaves Dunn, whose batting average has been subpar but who's still slugging and drawing walks. The Reds have given no indication they're looking to sign Dunn to a contract extension, which has fueled speculation

they'll trade him soon. "It's hard to imagine him staying there very long," says one N.L. scout. "He'd be a good fit in the American League, where he could play some DH and some left field. There are enough teams that could use his bat."

Six possibilities arise immediately: Cleveland, Toronto, Tampa Bay, Seattle, Oakland and Baltimore. The A's and Orioles, though, are more rebuilding than contending and thus aren't likely to give up top prospects. Cross off Seattle, too, which is in the too-little-too-late phase of its season.

Dunn could slide into Tampa Bay's DH spot, but the team has gotten good production out of the Cliff Floyd/Eric Hinske lefty-hitting combo and the Rays—unlikely to keep Dunn in free agency—wouldn't give up any of their top pitching prospects for a few months of service. Similarly, Dunn would be a huge boost to the middle of the Blue Jays' order, but hovering around .500 and playing in the deadly A.L. East, Toronto might not be willing to shell out prospects for him.

Cleveland's struggling offense would be the best fit. The Indians got off to a horrible start, but they're playing better and staying within range of .500. They aren't sure where they'll be at the deadline, though. Should the White Sox stumble, the Indians could be in position to pounce—if they can acquire a big bat, and soon. —S.D.

3 UP ▲

1 Felix Hernandez.

Yes, the Mariners are still struggling, but it's not King Felix's fault. He's 3-0 in his past three starts with a 0.00 ERA and 20 strikeouts and only 12 hits allowed in 21 innings.

2 American League East.

Pretty impressive that all five teams entered the week above .500.

3 Mike Aviles.

He was crushing the ball for Class AAA Omaha and hasn't stopped now that he's in K.C. Aviles has a .361 batting average and five RBIs in 36 at-bats, which is only two fewer RBIs than Tony Pena, the player he's replacing at shortstop, had in 162 at-bats.

3 DOWN ▼

1 Victor Martinez.

The Indians catcher's sans-power season took another step back when he landed on the disabled list with an elbow injury.

2 Greg Reynolds.

The Rockies rookie—and No. 2 overall pick in the 2006 draft—has an 8.79 ERA in June and only one strikeout in 14½ innings.

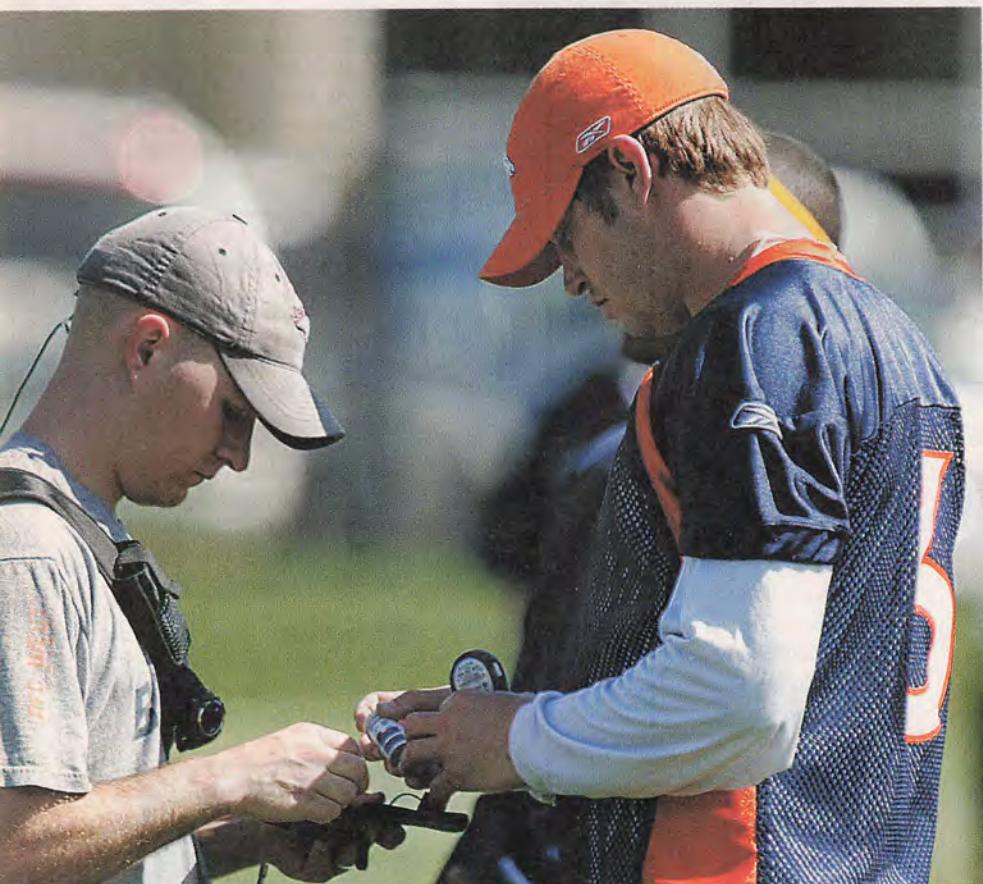
3 Mike Lamb.

It has been a tough month for the Twins third baseman, who has just one hit in 27 June at-bats. —R.F.



He was always tired. He was losing weight—lots of it. He knew something was wrong, but what? The diagnosis was unsettling—Type 1 diabetes—but a turning point.

Cutler has regained his fastball—and control of his life



Cutler has been using the OmniPod in offseason workouts, but he won't wear it during games.

Two plus two equals a colossal 2013 class

Introducing the Pro Football Hall of Fame's Class of 2013: Brett Favre ... Warren Sapp ... Michael Strahan ... Jonathan Ogden. Talk about a fantastic foursome.

When Strahan and Ogden announced their retirement last week, they were following in the footsteps of Favre and Sapp, who said goodbye in March. All four players arguably were the best at their positions during their careers, and they are locks to get the call to Canton in their first year of eligibility.

Strahan went out on a high note—with a Super Bowl championship ring.

By Dennis Dillon

ddillon@sportingnews.com

He has been sacked by Shawne Merriman, knocked down by Jared Allen and intercepted four times in two games by the Raiders. Now Jay Cutler has a new nemesis.

Type 1 diabetes.

The Broncos' quarterback received that diagnosis on April 16—13 days before he turned 25. Happy birthday.

Initially, Cutler was shocked by the news. Wouldn't you be? But at least that explained the unusual symptoms he had experienced.

Loss of appetite. Dry mouth. Frequent urination. And a mysterious pattern of weight loss.

Cutler weighed 238 when the 2007 season opened. He dropped eight pounds in one week in October, then lost about two pounds per week for the rest of the season. By the end, the incredible shrinking man was at 203.

A late-season Thursday night game in Houston was one of the low points. "I remember just being absolutely exhausted. I just didn't feel right going into it," Cutler says. "And there were a few deep throws that came up short. It just wasn't getting there."

Cutler huddled with Broncos head trainer Steve Antonopoulos. They chalked everything up to the grind of the season and the stress Cutler was experiencing in his first full season as an NFL starting quarterback.

Wrong.

The telltale signs followed Cutler after the season to Atlanta, where he went to work out with wide receiver Brandon Marshall and tight end Tony Scheffler. Cutler has always been a warrior in the weight room. But he wasn't getting any stronger or regaining any weight. After he worked out in the morning, he was exhausted. He'd go back to his apartment and sleep.

"You get depressed," Cutler says. "I didn't know what was going on."

The mystery was finally solved when he returned to Denver in late March for the team's offseason program. Medical personnel detected a high blood sugar level during a routine physical, and Cutler was sent to a diabetes specialist.

Now that the culprit has been identified, Cutler has a strategy for dealing with it. He has been wearing an insulin pump called an OmniPod that regulates the amount of insulin that gets delivered into his body. It is small—think of an egg sliced in half the long way and stuck to his abdomen—and is controlled by a hand-held

The seven-time Pro Bowl defensive end played 15 seasons for the Giants, setting a single-season NFL record for sacks (22½ in 2001) and finishing his career with 141½ (fifth all-time). But Strahan was more than a pass rusher. He was a complete end who was just as adept at stopping the run.

The 6-9, 345-pound Ogden was a tower of strength at left tackle for the Ravens, missing only 15 games in 12 seasons. He was voted to a stunning 11 Pro Bowls.

There has never been a quartet more deserving for simultaneous enshrinement in the Hall. Start chiseling their bronze busts now.

device that looks like a cell phone. When Cutler sits down to eat, he enters the amount of carbs he is about to ingest. The device then gives him a reading of how many insulin units it recommends.

Cutler has worn the OmniPod during OTAs, but he won't wear it during games to prevent it from getting smashed or delivering an overdose of insulin. He doesn't always wear the device off the field, either. For example, he recently went to the beach without it. Chicks don't dig OmniPods.

He also has altered his diet. Chicken, fish and vegetables are big on his new menu, although he occasionally has a hamburger or pizza.

Cutler has regained weight and regained his fastball. After catching passes from Cutler during one workout, receiver Brandon Stokley joked he was

going to have to start wearing two pairs of gloves.

"I feel good throwing the ball," Cutler says. "It's coming out of my hand with a lot of zip."

For the Broncos, that's the best news of the off-season.

SN



ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

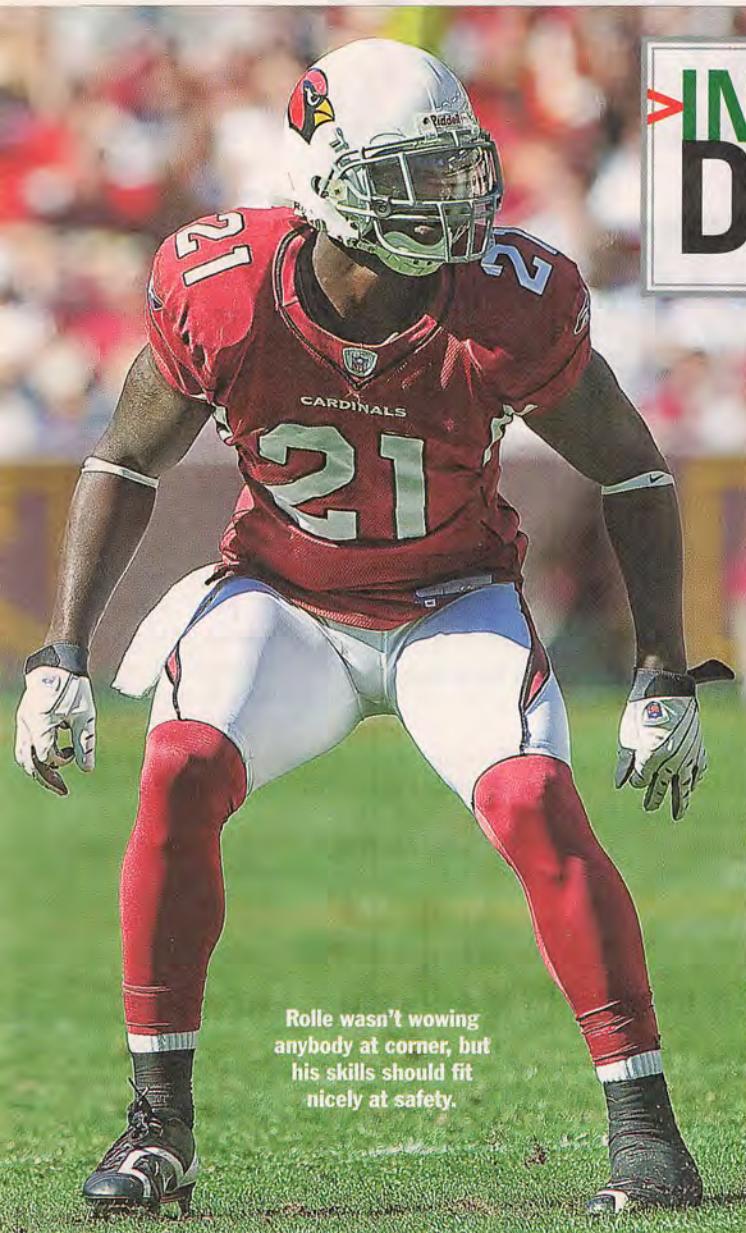
Clifton Brown thinks Chris Simms deserves another chance to start in the NFL. Find out why at sportingnews.com.

speedreads

Plaxico Burress is upset because he wants a new contract. Jeremy Shockley is just upset. Sean O'Hara thinks some of his Giants teammates are being selfish. Ain't life after the Super Bowl grand?

Many NFL teams are wrapping up their offseason workouts and letting their players go until training camp. Hope I'm wrong, but I can't help feeling we're going to be hearing about more knuckleheads getting into trouble in the next few weeks.

I applaud the NFL for requiring rookies to tour the Pro Football Hall of Fame as part of their orientation. More NFL players, not just rookies, need to learn about the league's history and heritage.



Rolle wasn't wowing anybody at corner, but his skills should fit nicely at safety.

> INSIDE DISH

DL **Shaun Rogers** has been working out at nose tackle and right end in the Browns' 3-4 defense. Both positions are new for Rogers, who primarily was a 4-3 tackle with one-gap responsibilities in his seven seasons with the Lions. Rogers has impressed line coach **Randy Melvin** with his hand quickness, balance and lateral movement. He certainly has the size to play nose tackle; Rogers is listed at 6-4, 340 but probably is heavier. The main adjustment Rogers would have to make at nose tackle is standing his ground and keeping his shoulders square to the line so he can control two gaps. As a 4-3 tackle, he was used to turning his shoulders and shooting upfield. ➤ Eagles defensive coordinator **Jim Johnson** has established a new rule for team drills. Any time there is a fumble, interception or incomplete pass, a defender must pick up the ball and return it for a touchdown—accompanied by the other 10 defensive players. Johnson wants to stress the importance of turnovers and defensive scores. Last season, the Eagles finished last in the league in takeaways with 19 (eight fumbles, 11 interceptions) and had no defensive touchdowns. ➤ **Antrel Rolle** appears to be making a smooth transition from cornerback to free safety—he ran with the first team in minicamp—and Cardinals coaches have praised his work ethic and willingness to embrace the move. Rolle got some snaps as the team's nickel back last season, and in certain coverages he was used as a deep middle safety. Rolle lacked ideal change-of-direction ability as a corner, but his speed and tackling skills should be more than adequate at safety. He will be challenged by **Aaron Francisco** and **Matt Ware**. ➤ RB **LaDainian Tomlinson** hasn't fumbled in a regular-season game since October 22, 2006. That could be attributed in part to an unusual ball-security drill used by Chargers offensive coordinator **Clarence Shelton**. The drill features a bungee cord, with one end attached to the football and the other end tied to a post. Players must secure the ball as they run away from the post. ➤ OT **Gosder Cherilus**, the Lions' first-round pick, will get some special tutoring this summer. Former NFL lineman **Lomas Brown**, who went to seven Pro Bowls during his 18-year career, will mentor Cherilus in training camp. Brown helped out Jets LT **D'Brickashaw Ferguson** last summer. ➤ The Titans finally got their man. The story of **Rocky Schwartz** came full circle last week when Tennessee signed the rookie safety from the University of Houston. The Titans had strong interest in Schwartz—they brought him to Nashville for a day and a half before the draft, then earnestly pursued him as a free agent after the draft—but he decided to sign with New Orleans. The Saints released Schwartz three weeks ago. The Jets also were interested in Schwartz before he signed with Tennessee.

SPOTLIGHT: OFFSEASON STARS

He isn't exactly a fresh-faced up-and-comer, but LG **Mike Wahle** clearly has been the standout of the Seahawks' offseason program. The former Panthers Pro Bowl pick is an upgrade from other players who have tried to fill the void created when **Steve Hutchinson** signed with the Vikings in 2006. Despite his age (31) and high mileage (10 seasons), Wahle took more snaps than any of the projected line starters in the final minicamp, showing good mobility and a mauler's mentality on running plays. ... Redskins QB **Jason Campbell** is making great strides with the team's new offense and is understanding the adjustments coach **Jim Zorn** expects. Campbell has a good feel for the routes and how receivers are supposed to run them. With the running game remaining essentially the same, he can focus on the passing scheme. Campbell's footwork is improving and he's pulling out from center slightly lower, which gives him better balance and more flexibility in the pocket.

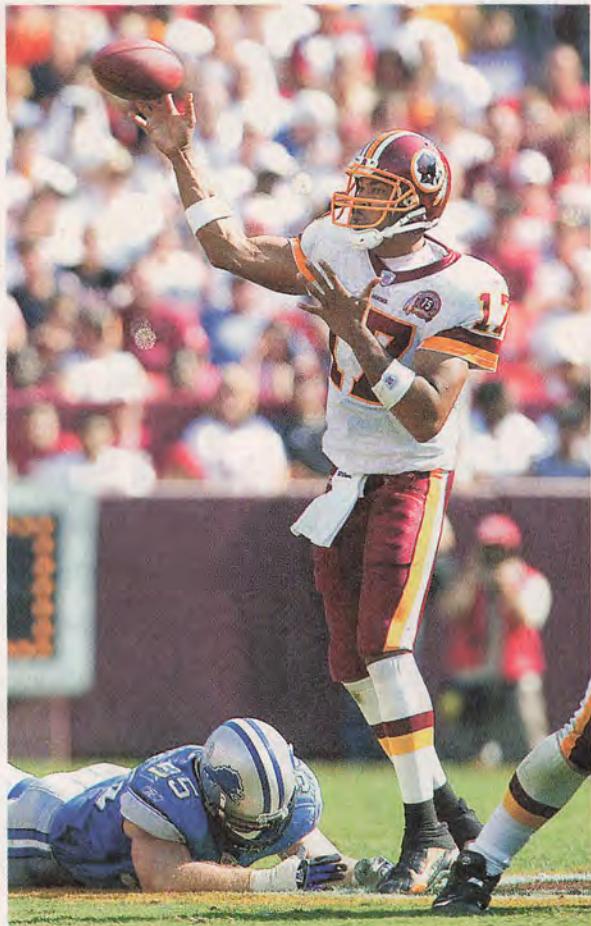
... Jets S **Eric Smith** has stood out this spring, just as he did in 2007. Coach **Eric Mangini** likes Smith's understanding of the system and on-field communication skills. He also has excellent ball skills and can play both safety spots. Smith appeared ready to unseat **Erik Coleman** as starting free safety last

summer until a hamstring injury slowed his progress. This year, he'll compete with **Abram Elam** for the job. ... Eagles LE **Victor Abiamiri**, who seldom played as a rookie, is pushing veteran **Juqua Parker** for a starting job. Abiamiri used the offseason program to absorb coordi-

nator **Jim Johnson**'s complex playbook and to improve his pass-rush skills. He already is a solid run stopper. Abiamiri's development gives Johnson an option on first and second downs and opens the door for Parker to play more on special teams. ... Steelers coaches are very excited about the development and toughness of LG **Chris Kemoeatu**, who has the difficult chore of replacing seven-time Pro Bowl pick **Alan Faneca**. Kemoeatu is an aggressive mauler who controls the point of attack and sustains blocks. He doesn't run well enough to pull on counter plays, but he has a hard-nosed demeanor that could rub off on teammates.

... 49ers FS **Dashon Goldson** has taken advantage of starter **Mark Roman**'s shoulder injury. Goldson

(6-2, 205) has the best range of any 49ers safety and has shown the ability to get to the ball in practice. He is tall, long-limbed and a big hitter; he's also good on special teams. But it might be hard for him to beat out Roman, a veteran who has won coach **Mike Nolan**'s trust.



Campbell is getting more comfortable in the pocket and in the Redskins' new offense.

Pats' defense could have a lot of Mayo

Patriots inside linebacker Jerod Mayo showed at rookie camp, in OTAs and during minicamp that he has what it takes to be the real deal. A tireless worker who had the sense to keep his mouth shut and follow the lead of veterans, Mayo has shown all the tools that made the team believe he was worthy of the 10th pick in the draft—speed in coverage, quickness at the line and recognition of what's happening in front of him. That last quality will determine how much he plays as a rookie, and Mayo has done plenty to stay in contention for a starting spot next to Tedy Bruschi.

Palmer is earning good grades in leadership, chemistry

Bengals quarterback Carson Palmer is a man on a mission. Intent on guiding the team to its second playoff berth in five seasons, he has taken his work ethic, passing ability and leadership skills to another level during the offseason. Palmer's footwork and throwing motion are flawless, but he is working hard to improve ball security in the pocket—his No. 1 weakness. Palmer also has taken

rookie wide receivers Jerome Simpson and Andre Caldwell under his wing, refusing to let Chad Johnson's trade demand disrupt what he calls the best team chemistry he has experienced.

"Every route I run, the ball is right there where it needs to be," Simpson says. "He's just a great quarterback, man. I'm gonna love playing for him."

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AFC

Focus on TIC

1 Chargers Antonio Gates is as integral to the offense's success as LaDainian Tomlinson. Gates can get open deep and is an excellent red zone target. Brandon Manumaleuna is one of the best blocking tight ends in the league.

2 Browns Kellen Winslow has a rare mix of talent and drive. With good health the past two years, he has flourished. Steve Heiden (6-5, 257) is an ideal backup; he has a big body for blocking and is an adequate receiver.

3 Chiefs Look for Tony Gonzalez to have another big season. At 32, he doesn't run as well as he once did, but he can still make difficult catches when covered well. Rookies Brad Cottam and Mike Merritt will help as blockers.

4 Colts Dallas Clark is overshadowed by the team's excellent wideouts, but he exploits the deep middle and picks up yards after the catch. Depth is a concern. The team is counting on draft picks Jacob Tamme and Tom Santi.

5 Steelers Heath Miller is one of the best all-around tight ends, though he has been underused as a receiver. He runs good routes and is a tenacious blocker. Matt Spaeth (6-7, 270) is a big target with good hands.

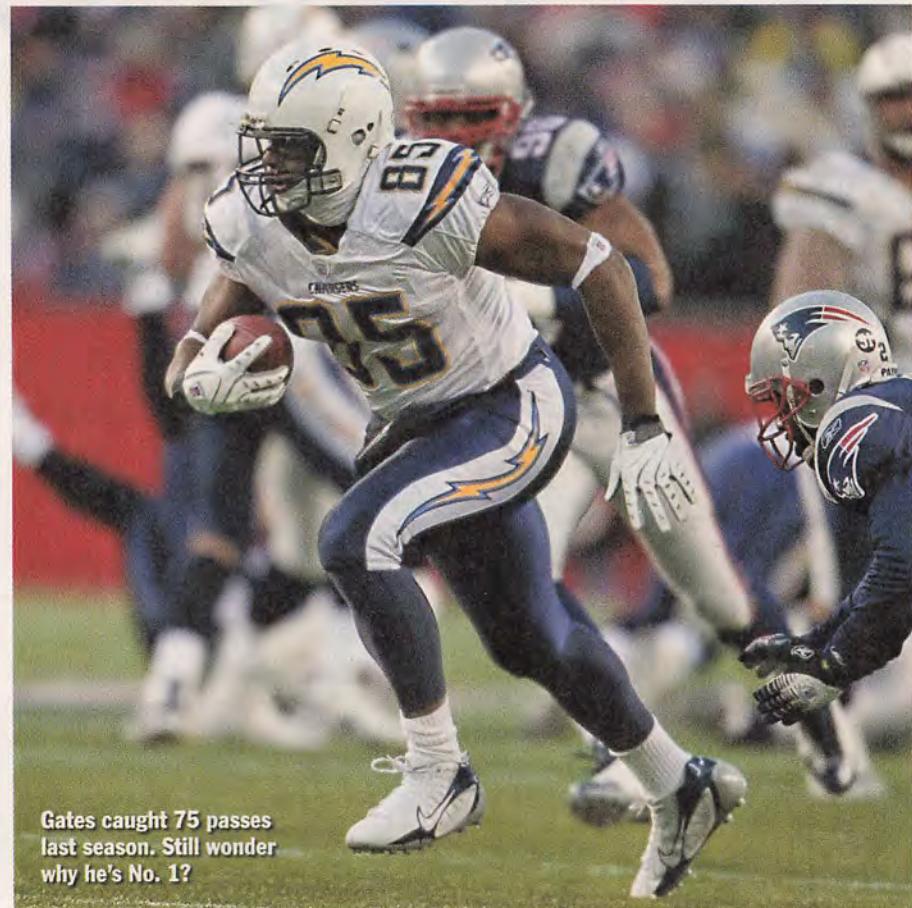
6 Ravens If Todd Heap isn't on the field—he missed 10 games in '07—the passing game will be in trouble. He still has the speed to get deep. Daniel Wilcox is also a good receiver, but the team's tight ends lack muscle as blockers.

7 Patriots Even though Benjamin Watson has never blossomed into a 60-catch target, he has become a far better blocker than expected. Marcus Pollard, 36, still has some snaps left in him, and David Thomas has flashed promise.

8 Broncos Tony Scheffler has good chemistry with Jay Cutler and is a dangerous weapon in the seams, but his foot problems are a concern. Nate Jackson has excellent hands, and Daniel Graham is a strong in-line blocker.

9 Titans Since being slowed by a knee injury in '07, newcomer Alge Crumpler has lost about 15 pounds. The Titans expect him to revive his career. Bo Scaife won't have the No. 1 role anymore, but he'll make a significant contribution.

10 Texans Owen Daniels has been a favorite target of the team's quarterbacks



Gates caught 75 passes last season. Still wonder why he's No. 1?

the past two years and is an improved blocker. He must overcome fumbling issues. Mark Bruener is a good blocker, and Joel Dreessen has potential.

11 Raiders Though he lacks speed, Zach Miller gets open and has good hands. He's a reliable blocker, but there's room for improvement. John Madsen is a converted receiver who has the speed to create mismatches.

12 Jets Chris Baker has the best hands on the team but isn't much of a vertical option. Free-agent pickup Bubba Franks can still be a threat in the red zone. First-round pick Dustin Keller needs to work on his blocking.

TOP
5

1. Antonio Gates, Chargers
2. Tony Gonzalez, Chiefs
3. Kellen Winslow, Browns
4. Dallas Clark, Colts
5. Heath Miller, Steelers

13 Jaguars Marcedes Lewis is coming into his own as a blocker but is still developing as a receiver. Depth is an issue. George Wrightster is struggling with a knee injury and might not be ready for camp.

14 Bengals This is not a key position in their scheme—the Bengals haven't had a 30-catch tight end since 1997. But free-agent acquisition Ben Utecht should help the passing game, and Reggie Kelly is a solid blocker.

15 Bills Robert Royal is a strong blocker but isn't a threat in the passing game. The Bills hope rookie Derek Fine develops into an all-around tight end.

16 Dolphins There isn't much impact here. Incumbent David Martin will get a serious challenge from former Cowboy Anthony Fasano. Coaches like Fasano's motor, and he probably has better hands than Martin.

GHT ENDS

NFC



Witten is a playmaker, and he can block a little, too.

1 Cowboys With his ability to make plays underneath and downfield, Jason Witten is one of the NFL's elite tight ends. He's also a terrific blocker. Second-round pick Martellus Bennett will play a lot in two-tight end sets.

2 Giants Assuming Jeremy Shockey is fully recovered from a broken leg, he'll be a dangerous receiving option and an above-average blocker. Kevin Boss (6-6, 253) is a huge target with soft hands but needs to work on blocking.

3 Redskins Chris Cooley is a complete tight end who can find the open spots. He has excellent hands and is a solid blocker. Todd Yoder is a top-shelf blocker, and second-round pick Fred Davis has playmaking potential.

4 49ers Vernon Davis is gifted and should flourish under new coordinator Mike Martz, who plans to use him at H-back and split him wide. Delanie Walker is another pass-catching

option, and Billy Bajema is a blocking specialist.

5 Bears Desmond Clark is a dependable blocker and receiver but lacks downfield speed. The Bears expect Greg Olsen to be a bigger threat this year. He has good size (6-5, 254) and speed but must improve his blocking.

6 Eagles Always a good receiver, L.J. Smith has improved his blocking—vs. the pass and run—the past couple of years. Newcomer Kris Wilson is an experienced backup, and Brent Celek could be the tight end of the future.

7 Rams Randy McMichael is a solid all-around player who will be featured more under new coordinator Al Saunders. Newcomer Anthony Becht will help the running attack; Joe Klopfenstein needs to step up his game.

8 Packers Donald Lee is a serviceable starter with more receiving than blocking talent. Tory Humphrey has downfield ability,

and rookie Jermichael Finley has great potential but can't be counted on right away.

9 Buccaneers The Bucs have solid depth but lack a top all-around starter. Alex Smith, Ben Troupe and red zone specialist Jerramy Stevens will compete for the pass-catching role. John Gilmore is a solid blocker.

10 Cardinals With his tremendous size (6-8, 265), Leonard Pope is a red zone threat. Ben Patrick, who has good speed and reliable hands, has had a strong offseason and could challenge Pope for the starting job.

11 Vikings After failing to play up to expectations in his first year with the team, Visanthe Shiancoe lost 10 pounds and has looked good in the offseason program. Jim Kleinsasser is a bruising blocker.

12 Saints Mark Campbell, who is returning from a back injury, is a good run blocker. Eric Johnson has good receiving skills but wasn't consistent last year and has durability issues. Billy Miller provides solid depth.

13 Seahawks The team needs rookie John Carlson to emerge as a receiving option. He showed good quickness and sure hands in offseason workouts. Will Heller and newcomer Jeb Putzier are better blockers than receivers.

14 Panthers Carolina has a group of nondescript role players. Jeff King figures to start—and he's the closest to a complete player. Dante Rosario and rookie Gary Barnidge might help in the passing game.

15 Lions Michael Gaines and Dan Campbell, who is recovering from an elbow problem, are solid but not dominant blockers. Neither has caught more than 25 passes in a season.

16 Falcons With their move to a power attack, the Falcons added free agent Ben Hartsock and rookie Keith Zinger, both of whom are primarily blockers. Martrez Milner has the speed to help in the passing game.

TOP
5

1. Jason Witten, Cowboys
2. Chris Cooley, Redskins
3. Jeremy Shockey, Giants
4. Vernon Davis, 49ers
5. L.J. Smith, Eagles

Russell must score a 65 to pass the Raiders' test

So much for stretching the field. Raiders coach Lane Kiffin, tired of seeing his offense in unfavorable down-and-distance situations, wants strong-armed QB JaMarcus Russell to dump off passes when breakdowns occur. As a result, the Raiders are spending a lot of time working with Russell on his accuracy, touch and reads. Kiffin says his quarterback needs to complete 65 percent of his throws for the offense to be successful.

BALTIMORE Look for second-year LT Jared Gaither to get first shot at replacing 11-time Pro Bowl tackle Jonathan Ogden, who retired last week. Gaither (6-9, 350) is as big as Ogden and has good explosiveness but is nowhere near as athletic. Gaither needs quicker feet in protection.

BUFFALO Rookie WR Steve Johnson has made a good impression. He is big (6-2, 202), fights for balls in coverage and has good hands and running ability. Johnson's route-running skills are raw, but he has a playmaker's mentality.

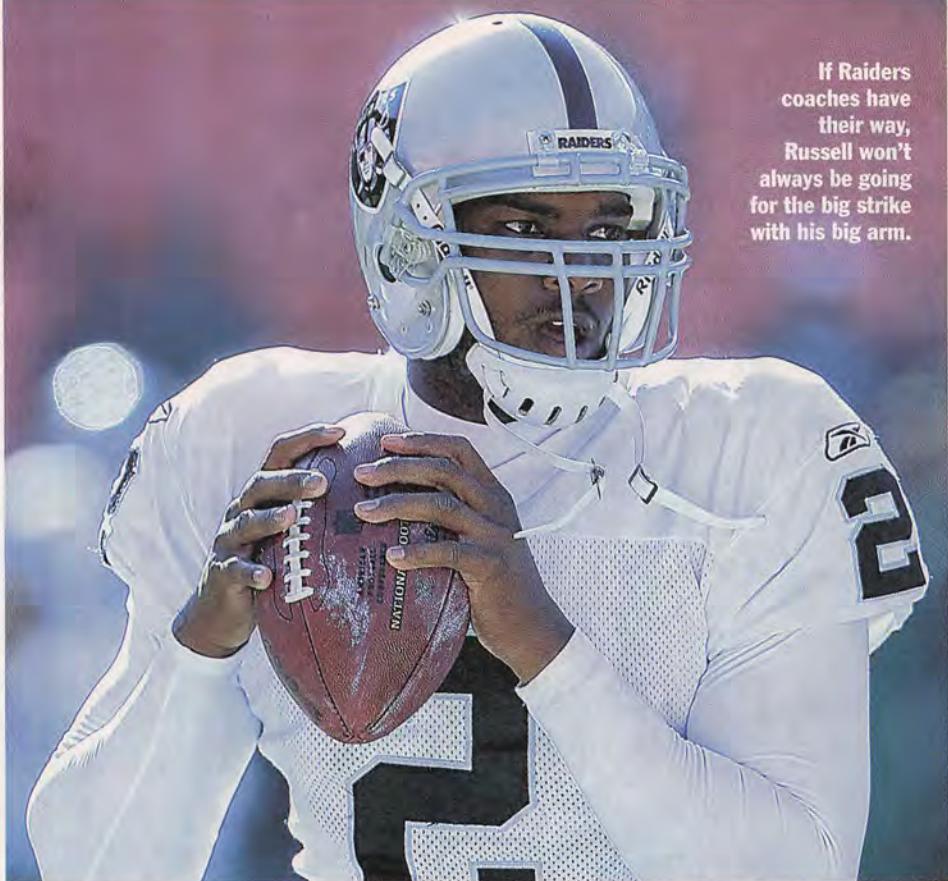
CINCINNATI SS Chinedum Ndukwu is wrestling the starting job away from Dexter Jackson. Ndukwu, a big hitter with speed and athleticism, needs only to improve his recognition skills. Jackson is a good leader but has lost a step.

CLEVELAND If the Browns maximize the run-after-catch abilities of WRs Donte' Stallworth, Joshua Cribbs and Kevin Kasper (who has been an offseason surprise), the offense will be scary-good. For that to happen, though, QB Derek Anderson must do a better job on touch passes.

DENVER Fourth-year CB Karl Paymah could see action in nickel packages. Early in his career, Paymah was limited to special teams because he was overly physical in the secondary and drew too many penalties. These days, he is positioning his body better and has a better understanding of offenses.

HOUSTON Coaches have been impressed by rookie LB Xavier Adibi, who is best suited for the weak side but also can play on the strong side. He's athletic and has the speed to run down ballcarriers. Adibi is expected to back up Morlon Greenwood.

INDIANAPOLIS It's time for injury-plagued CB Tim Jennings to realize his potential. The Colts



If Raiders coaches have their way, Russell won't always be going for the big strike with his big arm.

are set with Marlin Jackson and Kelvin Hayden as returning starters, but Jennings could fill a big need as the third corner. The 5-8, 185-pounder is aggressive in coverage and run support.

JACKSONVILLE If Troy Williamson becomes the fourth receiver, defenses will have matchup problems. The speed of Williamson and Dennis Northcutt in the slots would force teams to keep safety help over the top (and out of the box) and open up the running game.

KANSAS CITY Look for rookie Brandon Carr to begin the season as the third cornerback—and it might not take long for him to push veteran Patrick Surtain out of a starting job. Carr has the size (6-1, 206) to match up with bigger receivers and speed to stay with faster ones.

MIAMI The uncertain status of RE Jason Taylor thrusts Charlie Anderson into the spotlight at weakside linebacker in the 3-4. Anderson is fearless and doesn't shy away from head-on blocks but lacks Taylor's athleticism. He depends more on power than finesse.

NEW ENGLAND Speedy rookie Matt Slater, son of Hall of Fame tackle Jackie Slater, is operating under the radar. Slater was drafted in the fifth round as a kick returner, but he has worked at safety in OTAs and can play receiver if needed.

CORRESPONDENTS: Baltimore, Mike Preston; Buffalo, Allen Wilson; Cincinnati, Chick Ludwig; Cleveland, Steve Doerschuk; Denver, Lee Rasizer; Houston, Megan Manfull; Indianapolis, Mike Chappell; Jacksonville, Michael C. Wright; Kansas City, Adam Teicher; Miami, Jeff Darlington; New England, John Tomase; New York, J.P. Pelzman; Oakland, Steve Corkran; Pittsburgh, Gerry Dulac; San Diego, Kevin Acee; Tennessee, Jim Wyatt.

Slater's return ability will allow injury-plagued CB Ellis Hobbs to focus on defense.

NEW YORK Look for OLB David Bowens to contribute more in his second season with the team. Bowens has lost speed but makes up for it with anticipation and savvy. The Jets have been giving him some reps inside this spring so they can get him on the field more in 2008.

PITTSBURGH CB Ike Taylor has been solid since signing a contract extension in 2006, but he hasn't been the playmaker the team envisioned. Taylor has good speed and coverage skills and gets to the ball, but he has trouble holding on to potential interceptions.

SAN DIEGO LB Anthony Waters, fully healed from ACL surgery that ruined his rookie season, is moving like a man who understands his assignments. The physical Waters spent his year off learning the defense, and he's improving daily. Coaches hope he'll ease the pain of losing ILB Stephen Cooper (suspension) for the first quarter of the season.

TENNESSEE RT David Stewart has become a fixture up front. The team likes his physical style and is interested in signing him to a long-term contract. Stewart (6-7, 318) is big and strong, with above-average feet and a mean streak.

The Seahawks want to put a much better show on the road

The Seahawks fielded two defenses last season—they allowed 13.9 points and 306.3 yards in the noise factory at Qwest Field, where they were 7-1, and 22.5 points and 337.4 yards on the road, where they were 3-5. The players feed off the crowd at Qwest but tend to fizzle on the road without the emotional boost. To turn that around, the defense has been trying to amp up the enthusiasm and intensity in offseason practices. “We’re trying to make sure every practice we have right now is like a game situation and we stay fired up,” linebacker Julian Peterson says. “That’s the way we have to approach road games.”

ARIZONA Newcomer Bryan Robinson, 34, can play both nose tackle and end in the 3-4, and the coaches don’t think there will be a significant drop-off during the 15 to 25 snaps per game he plays. Because of a lack of line depth, the starters played too many snaps in 2007.

ATLANTA To accelerate rookie LT Sam Baker’s progress, the team is having RE John Abraham attack him with moves and techniques Baker likely hasn’t seen before. He has adjusted well, but he’ll have to ratchet up his speed when pads go on.

CAROLINA New starting C Ryan Kalil (6-2, 295) is small, but he’s no pushover. He’s a smart player who anchors well and knows how to win the leverage battle. The team hopes his athleticism will allow him to be a bigger factor pulling in the running game than the Panthers’ previous centers.

CHICAGO The release of RB Cedric Benson effectively makes second-round pick Matt Forte the starter. Forte has been described by the team as a complete back—and he’ll get every chance to prove it. First, he must show he can handle passing game responsibilities, such as picking up blitzes.

DALLAS Because of uncertainty involving Terry Glenn (knee), the team is counting on third-year pro Miles Austin to add speed at wide receiver. Austin (6-3, 215) has good size and has improved his route running and catching technique.

DETROIT DE Ikaika Alama-Francis has shown improvement, but that progress must continue at a rapid rate for him to rebound from an

unproductive rookie year. He must improve his footwork and hand placement to be effective.

GREEN BAY No one on the roster has improved more than CB Tramon Williams. He gained confidence after winning the nickel job late last year and made more progress in offseason workouts. With his improved bump-and-run skills and excellent speed, Williams will be tough to shake.

MINNESOTA New SS Madieu Williams has won over teammates. He is a smart, athletic player whose ability to run with receivers will allow the team more flexibility in its game plans.

NEW ORLEANS The Saints cleared a big offseason hurdle by signing RE Will Smith to a long-term contract extension.

He is coming off a down

year but should be free to do more damage because the team added DT Sedric Ellis and DE Bobby McCray to beef up its pass rush.

NEW YORK After his strong work in the offseason program, third-year LB Gerris Wilkinson is in solid shape to replace Kawika Mitchell on the weak side. The club hopes Wilkinson (6-2, 231), a slender athlete who can run and hit, has the instincts to be a consistent player.

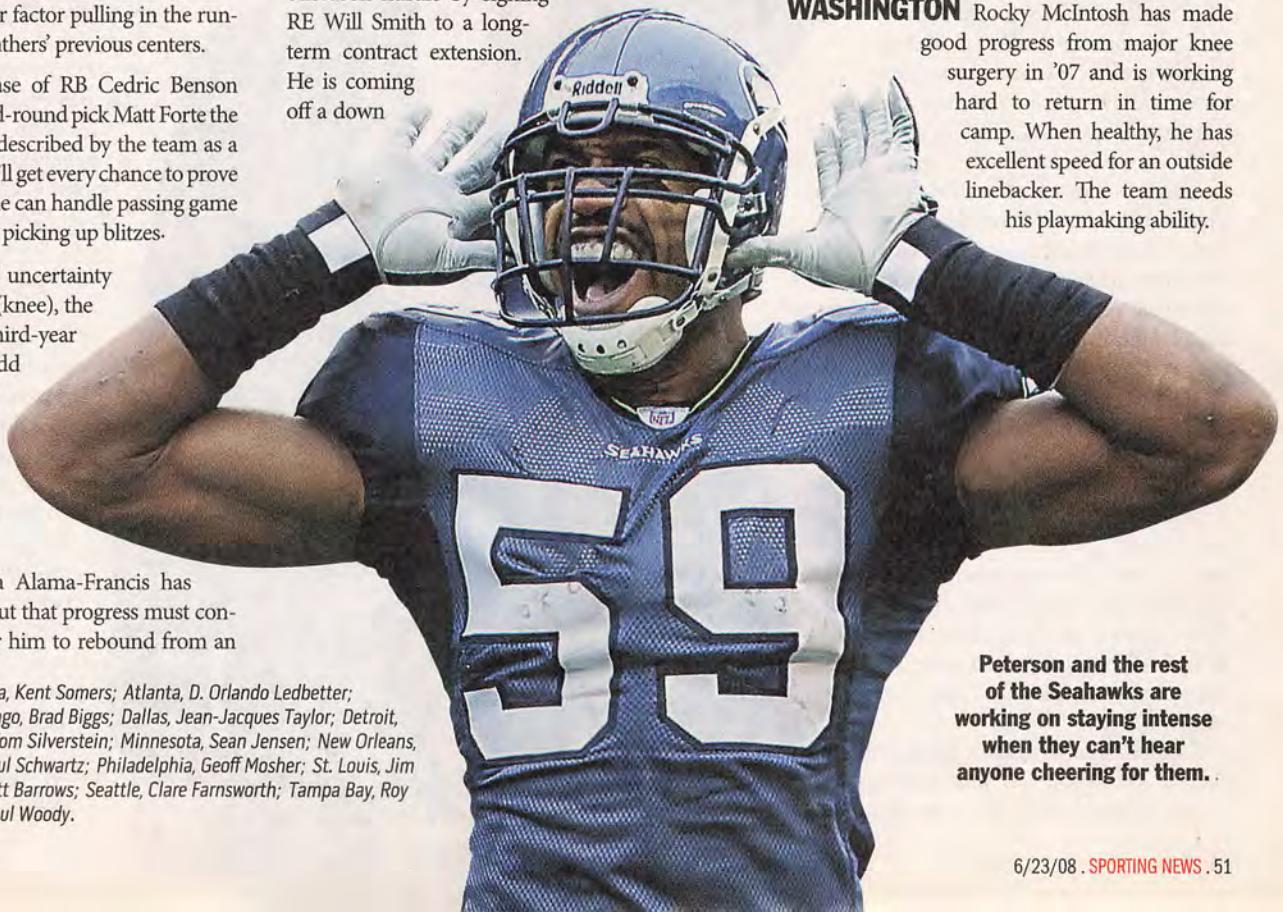
PHILADELPHIA Exceptional vision is what makes RB Brian Westbrook one of the NFL’s best. He has become a master at judging tackling angles and finding ways to avoid head-on collisions, especially in the open field and in the passing game.

ST. LOUIS The arrival of first-round pick Chris Long bumped DE Victor Adeyanju down the depth chart, but Adeyanju has responded by working hard to improve his strength. His bull rush looks a lot more effective.

SAN FRANCISCO First-round pick Kentwan Balmer has received good reviews from teammates, who appreciate his work ethic and hunger for coaching. Balmer has been working at left end in the team’s 3-4, but scouts think he also can play nose tackle.

TAMPA BAY After missing most of last season with a foot injury, S Sabby Piscitelli is pushing hard for regular reps. His athleticism is his greatest asset. He blends it with a passion for hitting, which should make him a star on special teams.

WASHINGTON Rocky McIntosh has made good progress from major knee surgery in ’07 and is working hard to return in time for camp. When healthy, he has excellent speed for an outside linebacker. The team needs his playmaking ability.



Peterson and the rest of the Seahawks are working on staying intense when they can't hear anyone cheering for them.

CORRESPONDENTS: Arizona, Kent Somers; Atlanta, D. Orlando Ledbetter; Carolina, Darin Gant; Chicago, Brad Biggs; Dallas, Jean-Jacques Taylor; Detroit, Tom Kowalski; Green Bay, Tom Silverstein; Minnesota, Sean Jensen; New Orleans, Mike Triplett; New York, Paul Schwartz; Philadelphia, Geoff Mosher; St. Louis, Jim Thomas; San Francisco, Matt Barrows; Seattle, Clare Farnsworth; Tampa Bay, Roy Cummings; Washington, Paul Woody.

Jim Calhoun isn't letting a cancer diagnosis slow him down—not when he has another title to win.

In it to win it

By Mike DeCourcy

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They're just three little words, but together they form perhaps the most pernicious phrase in the English language:

You ... have ... cancer.

Imagine the horror of being told this news just once in your life. Now, multiply that by three, add 773 victories and two NCAA championships and you can imagine what it's like to be Jim Calhoun.

Except it's hard to put oneself in Calhoun's place because few of us would react as he has. He is 66 years old and wealthy as an oil trader.

He has given 22 years to the University of Connecticut, which presented him the chance to coach at the college game's highest level—and allowed him to do so in his native New England. His induction into the Basketball Hall of Fame is not likely, it's already complete—he was enshrined three years ago. He loves golf, has multiple homes and has been married to the same woman, Pat, for more than four decades. If this were not the perfect recipe for a contented retirement, what would be?

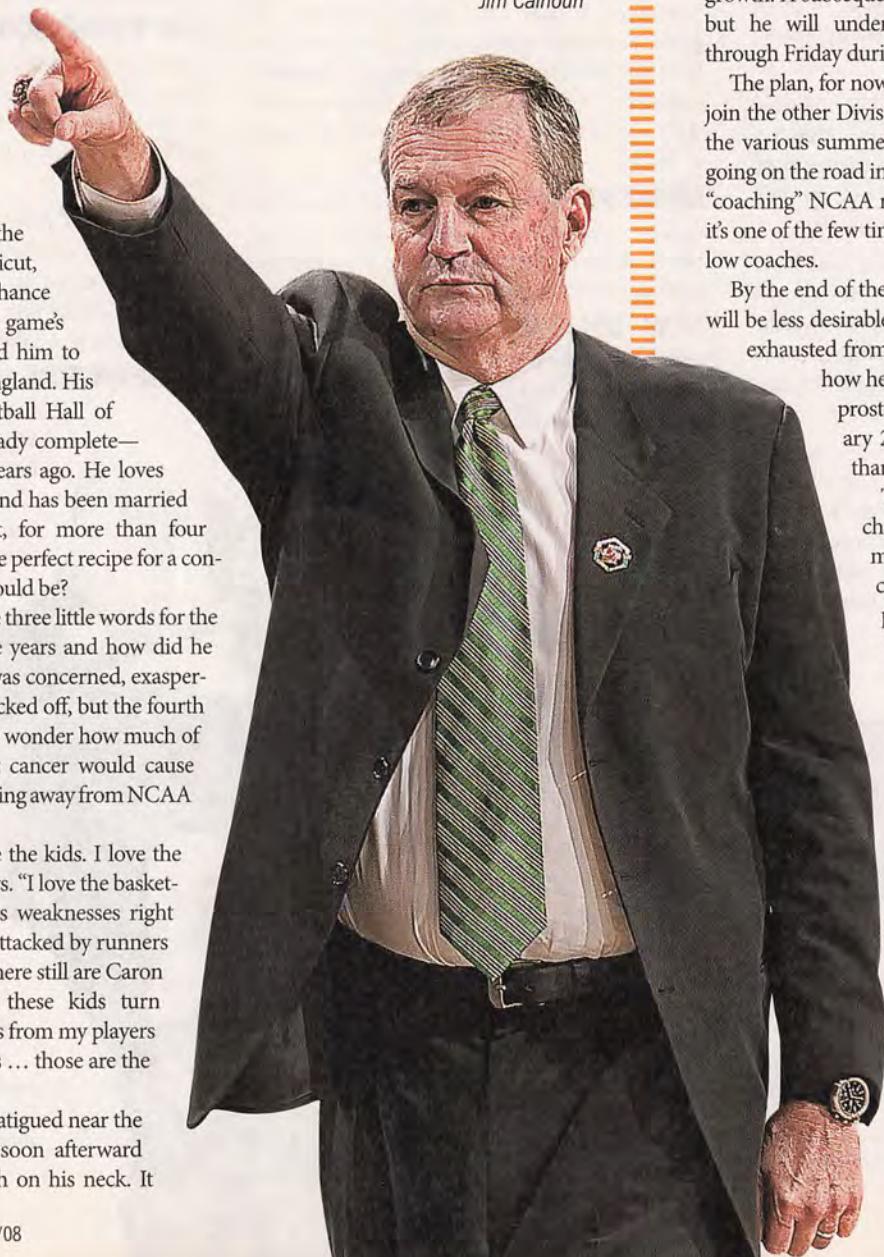
So Calhoun heard those three little words for the third time in the past five years and how did he react? Well, no doubt he was concerned, exasperated and probably a bit hacked off, but the fourth stage of the process was to wonder how much of the July recruiting circuit cancer would cause him to miss. He is not walking away from NCAA basketball.

"I love the game. I love the kids. I love the competition," Calhoun says. "I love the basketball culture. You know its weaknesses right now, so many kids being attacked by runners and people like that. But there still are Caron Butler stories, watching these kids turn around. All the phone calls from my players during something like this ... those are the reasons I do it."

Calhoun began to feel fatigued near the close of last season and soon afterward located a peculiar blemish on his neck. It

'It's good to have your mind on other things. I still want to be around this game.'

—Connecticut coach
Jim Calhoun



grew rapidly, from a small pimple to nearly the size of a golf ball. "You couldn't see it, but I could feel it," he says. "I listened to my own body, and it just wasn't right."

A few doctor visits led to a needle biopsy, "which is not the most pleasant experience in the world," Calhoun says. That produced the diagnosis of squamous cell carcinoma. It is the second most common form of skin cancer, generally treatable, as when it struck Calhoun in 2007.

He had surgery in early May to remove the latest growth. A subsequent scan showed he was cancer-free, but he will undergo radiation treatment Monday through Friday during July to complete his treatment.

The plan, for now, is to hit the road each weekend to join the other Division I coaches scouting prospects at the various summer events. He says he doesn't mind going on the road in July because it's the only basketball "coaching" NCAA rules allow during the summer and it's one of the few times he can interact directly with fellow coaches.

By the end of the month, Calhoun expects traveling will be less desirable, though. He has been told he'll be exhausted from the radiation treatments. He'll see how he feels when he gets there. When his prostate cancer was discovered in February 2003, he was back to coaching less than two weeks after surgery.

That team was building toward a championship that would arrive 14 months later. This season, with 7-3 center Hasheem Thabeet returning, point guard A.J. Price recovering well from a knee operation and a loaded recruiting class on the way, UConn has another good chance at a title. Calhoun leaves no doubt he wants another one.

"We're very excited. That helps you get through some of these things," he says. "It's good to have your mind on other things. I still want to be around this game. This time of year, when kids are in summer school, you can just sit around and talk to them; it's actually a very good time for me. It's what I do. It's what I love."

"I told my wife I'd get out at 50. That's quite a way back in the rear-view mirror."

SN

speedreads

Jealous assistant coaches might resent the \$420,000 contract presented to Kansas State assistant Dalonte Hill, 29, the relatively inexperienced recruiter who became the highest-paid Division I assistant after bringing star forward Michael Beasley to the Wildcats. Smart assistant coaches will make sure that figure comes up next time they're negotiating their own raises.

Now that Jordan Crawford's transfer has left Indiana without a single returning recruited scholarship player, the NCAA should feel secure that it needs to inflict no more punishment for the previous coaching staff's alleged recruiting call violations. To ban the Hoosiers from postseason play in the immediate future would be redundant.

Madison Square Garden officials believe a pending renovation will make their building a great home for an NCAA Tournament regional—when the next slot opens in 2012. There's no cooler place for a basketball game than the Garden, and there's no cooler city on the planet, but we'll all need to begin saving now to afford hotel rooms.



ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

For the latest offseason college basketball news, go to sportingnews.com.

>INSIDE DISH



Jordan won't be having any Chinese food this summer.

There was a bright side to the visa issue that kept rapidly improving Tulsa C **Jerome Jordan** from traveling with a Conference USA team for a three-game playing tour of China. "Jerome probably would have lost 10 pounds over there, which wouldn't have been good for him," coach **Doug Wojcik** says. Most players on the trip were uncomfortable with the local cuisine. A 7-footer, Jordan got his weight up to 235 as a sophomore and needs to keep adding strength. Jordan dramatically improved at the close of last season, averaging 13.0 points after March 1—up nearly five per game from

his production the first four months of the season. Jordan's improvement was the result of gaining strength and confidence. Wojcik says there was one other advantage for Jordan in not making the trip: "He got all the gear that everyone got but didn't have to put up with a 16-hour flight." > Memphis coach **John Calipari**, who led the C-USA tour, expects that one day his university's connection to China will lead to a Chinese player suiting up for the Tigers. But he doesn't expect the Tigers to be the only beneficiaries of making China more aware of NCAA basketball. The nation's government wants to double the number of its students who are college-educated and is expected to consider sending some of its elite basketball players to the United States. "This is not just for Memphis, although we could be the lead school," Calipari says. > Kentucky appears to be gambling that 6-9 PF **Matt Pilgrim** will have no choice but to straighten up his act after transferring from Hampton. Although he was one of the most talented players in the program, Pilgrim averaged only 19.8 minutes and 7.7 points for the Pirates as a sophomore and started just 11 of 26 games because he was not considered to be a devoted worker in practice. That makes him a curious fit playing for coach **Billy Gillispie**, who built a reputation for pushing his team hard during his first season with the Wildcats. From Kentucky, Pilgrim's next move would be down to Division II or the NAIA—or out of college basketball. So there'll be a strong incentive for him to adapt to Gillispie's style. >

North Carolina fans wondered why elite recruit **John Henson**, a 6-10 power forward from Round Rock, Texas, was not included on the invitation list for the U.S. team that will compete at the U-18 FIBA Americas Championship next month in Argentina. One of the fastest-rising prospects in recent years, Henson was asked to compete for a spot on the national team but didn't want to miss Nike's LeBron James Skills Academy in Akron from July 5-9.

Dick finally will get a chance to show what that right arm is for.



Arkansas quarterback Casey Dick has one last chance to prove that early projections of success were not unfounded. NFL scouts will be watching.

Every Hog has his day, right?

By Matt Hayes

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Here he is, everyone: the pampered athlete.

Four different offensive coordinators and four different quarterbacks coaches in four years. His redshirt wasted eight games into his freshman season to save a team in the tank. His next two seasons on the brutal end of fan backlash—by no fault of his own—in a state where every day begins and ends with someone, somewhere, *Calling the Hogs*.

"You can sit back and say it was tough," says Arkansas quarterback Casey Dick. "Or you can do what you're asked to do and have faith that it will all work out in the end."

Want someone to root for this fall? Here he is:

the mistreated athlete.

When Arkansas made the bold move last December to pull coach Bobby Petrino away from the NFL, the first person I thought of was Dick, the guy who couldn't get a break in his first three seasons. Now he's set up for everything to finally fall his way.

No one develops quarterbacks like Petrino. No one sees the game, understands defenses and calls plays like Petrino. No one prepares quarterbacks and puts them in better position to succeed.

Eight months ago, Dick was pretty good at handing off. Eight months from today, Dick will be rising on NFL draft boards.

"Casey will be successful because he works hard at it," Petrino says. And because—as much as anything—he has learned to persevere.

Three years ago, Arkansas was 2-5 and on the

verge of its worst season in decades. So former coach Houston Nutt burned Dick's redshirt and threw him into the SEC meatgrinder. The Hogs went 2-2 the rest of the way, and the two losses were by a combined six points.

Just when it looked as though Dick's wasted season would be worth it, along came local hero/heralded recruit Mitch Mustain—and the Arkansas program hasn't been the same since. Mustain was 8-0 as a starter in 2006 but was pulled for Dick a series into that eighth start. Dick led the team to the SEC championship game, only to get caught in the backwash of the Nutt/Mustain soap opera.

A year later—after Mustain had transferred to USC—Dick's job changed again, this time to caretaker. He handed off to ubertalented tailbacks Darren McFadden and Felix Jones and stayed out of the way—except on third-and-long, when he

was asked to make a play.

Dick was set up to fail in his first three seasons. Now he's set up to thrive in a scheme that has dominated college football this decade. In four years at Louisville, Petrino-coached teams finished sixth, first, seventh and second nationally in total offense.

And understand this: Dick didn't play poorly last fall. He completed 57 percent of his passes and threw for 18 touchdowns with 10 interceptions despite predictable play-calling.

Under Petrino, the offense won't sniff predictable.

"Our quarterback," says All-American center Jonathan Luigs, "will be a quarterback this season."

Not a pampered quarterback, a prepared one. For the first time in four years. **SN**

speedreads

So Bill Curry has decided to become the first coach for college football newcomer Georgia State, a downtown Atlanta commuter school that hopes to one day join the Sun Belt Conference. Do you really need any more evidence that coaches simply can't walk away from the game?

We've all enjoyed making fun of Nicky Satan. Now let's get serious: Saban and his wife recently gave \$1 million in scholarship money for first-generation students to attend Alabama. That's no drop in the bucket, people. That's a serious commitment.

Lost amid the hoopla of **Tom Hansen** retiring as Pac-10 commissioner is this reality: The league could be the next to expand to 12 teams. Hansen fought expansion, but shrinking university budgets could force the Pac-10's hand. Expanding to 12 would allow the conference to split into divisions and reap the monetary rewards of a championship game while giving the league more negotiating weight with television and bowl contracts. Two of the top candidates for the job—WAC commissioner **Karl Benson** and former Big 12

commissioner **Kevin Weiberg**—have the personality to sway the league's presidents and would be proactive in pursuing expansion. Any expansion would revolve around television markets, which means BYU and/or Utah (Salt Lake City) would be at the top of the list. Boise State would be the top draw in terms of fan interest. ► New Mexico State is in danger of losing its Bowl Championship Subdivision (Division I) status if it fails to average 15,000 fans this fall. The Aggies averaged 14,412 last year, falling short of the NCAA's 15,000 mandate for a rolling two-year period. The school could petition the NCAA if it fails to reach 15,000 this season because it reached the goal in the previous four reporting periods. The decline in attendance isn't a good sign for coach **Hal Mumme**, who has only eight wins in three sea-

A change of direction

Five other quarterbacks who will benefit from having new coaches this fall:

Justin Willis, SMU. He threw for 51 touchdowns in his first two seasons in an offense that had no identity or direction. New coach June Jones, who has redefined passing offense in both the NFL and college football, is stepping in. The problem: Willis missed spring practice because of off-field issues. If he steers clear of trouble, he'll win the job in the fall and have a huge season.

Stephen McGee, Texas A&M. He has directed a run-oriented offense the past two seasons despite his smart play (only 10 interceptions in 677 attempts) and ability to do more in the passing game. Mike Sherman's West Coast offense will allow McGee to thrive in a timing-based scheme built on accuracy.

Kirby Freeman, Baylor. After four years of disappointment at Miami, Freeman left for Baylor because of new coach Art Briles and his quarterback-friendly offense. Briles wants athletic, tough quarterbacks (see: Kevin Kolb), and Freeman, a fifth-year senior, fits the mold. He must regain confidence after a tough 2007 season in Miami and beat out returning starter Blake Szymanski.

Thaddeus Lewis, Duke. He's the unknown ACC star. Despite playing on two horrible teams, Lewis improved his numbers from 11 touchdown passes and 16 interceptions as a freshman to 21 TDs and 10 interceptions last year. Watch how the little things new coach David Cutcliffe stresses—tempo, mechanics, discipline—help Lewis develop.

Austin Davis, Southern Miss. Davis signed with Southern Miss two years ago thinking he'd direct the Crawl Ball offense of former coach Jeff Bower. Now he'll lead the no-huddle, pass-happy scheme of new coach Larry Fedora, whose offenses at Florida and Oklahoma State were among the best in the nation.



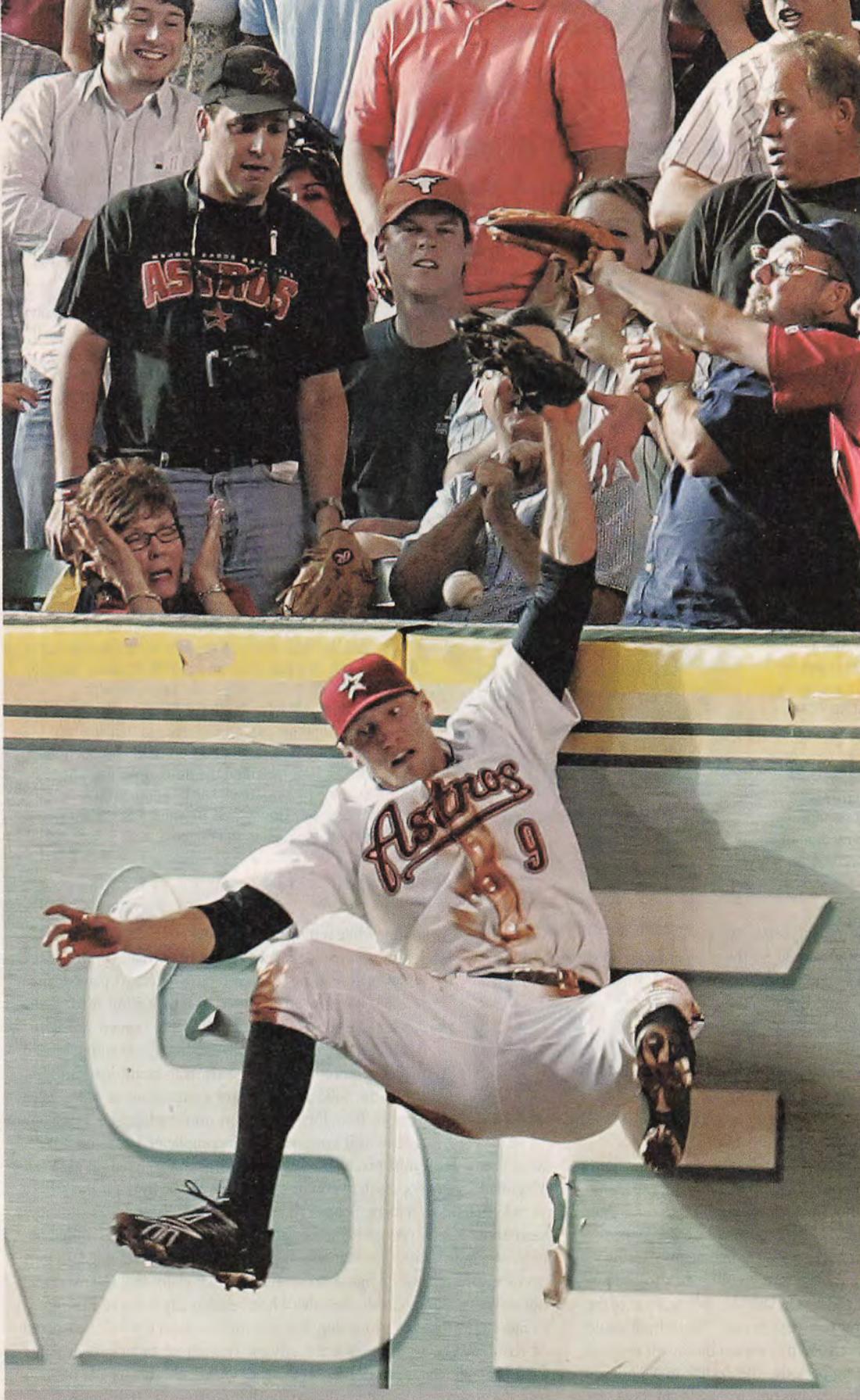
Willis is bound to swoon over June Jones' offense.

INSIDE DISH

sions while getting the university embroiled in a discrimination lawsuit that was settled last year. ► **DL Jerrell Powe**, a onetime mega recruit who hasn't played since 2005, has moved a step closer to suiting up for Ole Miss—in theory. The NCAA has denied academic appeals for Powe to enroll—saying in one ruling he had met requirements only with “significant assistance”—but the SEC recently gave commissioner **Mike Slive** more flexibility to rule on non-qualifiers. It's unlikely

Slive will approve Powe's complicated case because it

would set a dangerous precedent. ► **Mike Garrison**'s resignation as West Virginia University president couldn't come at a worse time for the school in its legal fight with former coach Rich Rodriguez. If Rodriguez's attorneys can connect Garrison and his administration to a phony degree handed out to West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin's daughter—Garrison resigned, in part over the controversy—it figures to strengthen their claim that Garrison was not above working outside the rules when he allegedly induced Rodriguez to sign his contract by promising that a \$4 million buyout would be waived or reduced if he were to leave the school. Though an independent panel found no evidence Garrison was involved, it did rule that WVU officials gave the governor's daughter a degree she didn't earn—on Garrison's watch.



EXPOSURE

Oh, nooooooo!

If you think leaping Astros right fielder Hunter Pence (just missing stealing a home run from the Yankees' Alex Rodriguez) looks a little scared about what's going to happen next, check out the fan above his right shoulder. She's downright terrified. It's the stuff fourth-place seasons are made of.

Photo by
PAT SULLIVAN / AP

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